





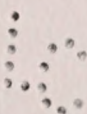
THE COST OF WINGS
AND OTHER STORIES

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COST OF WINGS
AND OTHER STORIES

BY
RICHARD DEHAN, *pseud.*

AUTHOR OF
"ONE BRAVER THING," "BETWEEN TWO THIEVES," ETC.

Graves, Clotilde L. M.



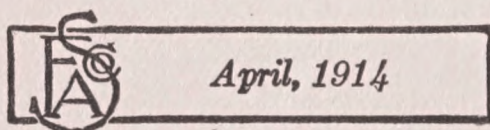
NEW YORK
FREDERICK A. STOKES COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE COST OF WINGS	1
A FADED ROMANCE	11
AN INDIAN BABY	41
YVONNE	52
THE DELUSION OF MRS. DONOHUE	70
PONSONBY AND THE PANTHERESS	92
A FAT GIRL'S LOVE STORY	104
IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION	116
THE GEWGAW	122
THE NIGHT OF POWER	134
THE MAN WHO COULD MANAGE WOMEN	145
OBSESSED	155
A VANISHED HAND	164
AN ORDEAL BY FIRE	179
HOW THE MISTRESS CAME HOME	198
THE MOTOR-BURGLAR	212
THE LOST ROOM	219
FATHER TO THE MAN	226
THE FLY AND THE SPIDER	235
FOR VALOR!	243
MELLICENT	248
THE COLLAPSE OF THE IDEAL	263
THE HAND THAT FAILED	272
HIS SILHOUETTE	280
A NOCTURNE	292
THE LAST EXPEDITION	298

THE COST OF WINGS

SHELDRIK, returning, refreshed and exhilarated, from a spin with a friend who had brought down a racing car of forty horse-power and an enthusiasm to match, found his wife sitting in the same chair, in the same attitude, as it seemed to him, in which he had left her, in the bare, dull sitting-room of their quarters at the Pavilion Hotel, on the edge of Greymouth Links, from which starting point Sheldrick, in fulfillment of his recent engagement with the Aero Club of France, had arranged to take wing for Cherbourg, wind and weather permitting, on the morrow.

It would be difficult exceedingly to imagine Caruso as an engineer or a bank manager, or in any capacity other than that of operatic star. It would be equally difficult to picture Shackleton as a side-splitting antic and quip-monger, or Péliissier in the rôle of the dauntless explorer. Sheldrick, the most recent idol of the flying world, was the type-ideal of the aviator.

Mathematician, engineer, meteorologist, and athlete, his tall, lightly built but muscular frame carried the head of an eagle. The wide forehead, sloping to the temples, the piercing prominently set eyes, the salient nose, and the wide, firm, deep-cut mouth characterizing the long-winged birds of powerful flight, were Sheldrick's. His, too, the long, supple neck, the curiously deceptive shoulder slope that disguises depth of chest while his long

arms looked as though, were they clothed with feathers, they might cleave the air; and his feet gripped the ground through the thin, soft boots he always wore, as the eagle's talons grip the rock.

Perhaps he was not unaware of the suggested resemblance. He had certainly christened his recently completed monoplane "Aquila," and had piloted her to victory in two minor events at the Moncaster Spring Flying Meeting in April of that year, and at the Nismes Concours des Aviateurs of three weeks before had carried off the Grand Prix of 25,000 francs for the longest flight under favorable weather conditions. And at the Club dinner following the presentation of the prizes, Sheldrick, flushed with conquest and congratulations, had given that pledge whereby the soul of the woman who yet loved him was wrung to torture anew.

"After all that I have borne," Mrs. Sheldrick had said to herself, sitting in her hideous red moreen-covered chair by the green Venetian-blinded window of the staring hotel sitting-room—"after three years of agony, silently, patiently endured—after all his promises, I am still upon the rack."

She looked rather like it as she sat by the window, the center one of three that gave a view across the gray-green links, and the gray-brown beach of smooth, sliding pebbles that gave place to the gray-white, throbbing water of the English Channel. And the white, drawn face that masked her frenzy of anguish, and the dark-gray, haunted eyes through which her suffering spirit looked, greeted her husband as he burst into the room, fresh from his banquet of speed and clean, salt, buoyant air, and sympathetic, enthusiastic companionship, like an unexpected douche of ice water.

"Haven't you been out?"

Sheldrick uttered the words recorded, upon a pause implying the swallowing of others less neutrally amiable. And his face, which had already clouded, darkened sullenly as his wife replied: "I have traveled some distance since you left here with your friend."

"Where have you been?" asked Sheldrick unwillingly, as a man who suspects that the question may open some unwelcome topic.

Mrs. Sheldrick looked at her husband full; and, though it had seemed to him that he had read the book of her beauty from preface to finis, there was something new to him in her regard as she answered:

"I have gone over in memory every week of the last three years that we have spent together, Edgar; and the road has been a rough and stony one, without one green patch of grass to rest on by the wayside, or one refreshing spring at which to drink. But I was patient while I plodded after you, because I saw an end to what I was enduring. Now it seems that I am mistaken. It is only my endurance that is at an end."

"Why do you talk in allegory, Ella?" Sheldrick broke out impatiently. He threw down his leather motoring cap with the talc eye shields upon the sofa, and pitched his heavy overcoat upon a chair in a corner of the ugly room, and let his long, lithe body down into a hideous Early Victorian plush armchair beside the empty fireplace, where nothing crackled but some fantastically bordered strips of red and green gelatine paper, shuddering under the influence of a powerful chimney draught. "I'm not an imaginative man," he went on. "Even if my mind were not occupied with a dozen affairs of supreme urgency I should still boggle at inter-

preting your cryptic utterances. If you want them understood, make them to some minor poet at a garden party or an At Home. You've stacks of invitations from the nicest people to all sorts of functions ever since I pulled off those two events at Moncaster and the Grand Prix at Nismes. And now that it's May, and the season in full swing, you might be having no end of a capital time at home in London instead of——" She interrupted him with a passionate gesture.

"I have no home!"

"No?" said Sheldrick coolly, leaning back his head against the knobby back of the Early Victorian arm-chair.

"No!" said Mrs. Sheldrick, and her passion seemed to dash itself against and break upon the man's composure as a wave beats and breaks upon a rock. "It was a home, once, when you were working partner in the firm of Mallard, Mallard and Sheldrick, Manufacturers of Automobiles; and the life you led was a normal, ordinary, everyday life, and the risks you ran were everyday, ordinary risks, such as a woman who loved you—note that I say *who loved you*—might bear without going mad or dying of terror. But it is a prison now. I cannot breathe in it. Even when you are there with me—and when every postman's knock, or telegraph boy's ring, or telephone message has for the moment ceased to be fraught with hideous, often-dreamed-of, never-forgotten possibilities . . . when each newsboy's voice, yelling in the streets, has temporarily ceased to be the voice of Fate for me—it is no longer home! It is a caravanserai, from which Hope and Content and Peace of Mind may go out before the next day's dawning, leav-

ing the door open that Death and Despair may the more freely enter in!"

"Ella!" exclaimed Sheldrick, looking at her open-eyed. She had always been such a quiet, calm, self-possessed woman, that now, as she rose up out of her chair suddenly, as though she had been prodded with a bayonet, she was strange and new, and rather awe-inspiring. As she stood before him, her passion-breathing face an ivory cameo between the drooping folds of her rich blue-black hair, her gray eyes glittering fiercely between the narrowed lids under the straight black brows, her lips two bitterly straightened lines of scarlet showing the gleaming teeth, her firm chin implacable in its set upon the dainty cravat of muslin and black-silk ribbon, her slight bosom panting fiercely under her bodice folds, her slender limbs rigid beneath the sheath-fitting gown of silken chestnut-colored cloth, the man, her husband, looked at her more attentively than he had looked for years.

"Ella, what is the matter? What has upset you like this? If there is anything I can do to put things right, why not tell me, and—and——"

Sheldrick's voice faltered, and his eyes looked away from his wife's as he saw the reviving hope leap desperately into her face. It died instantly, leaving her gray eyes more somber, and the lines of her scarlet, parted lips more bitter than before.

"Ah, yes!" she said. "Why not tell you what you know already, and be coaxed and patted into compliance and meek, patient submission for the hundredth time! You will kiss me good-bye to-morrow morning, if the weather permits of your starting, and make this flight. It is to be the last, the very last, like the others that have gone before it; it is only so much more daring,

only so much more risky, only so much more dangerous than the things that other aviators have dared and risked and braved. If it blows from the north you will not dream of making the venture—the jagged rocks and shoals, and the towering, greedy seas of the Channel Islands threaten things too grim. You will wait, and I with you—oh, my God!—for a favorable wind. Your successes at Brookfields and at Nismes have made the ‘Aquila’ patent worth a moderate fortune; they are turning out replicas of her at your workshops as rapidly as they can make them—your manager took on twenty more skilled hands only last week. You have done what you set out to do; we are freed from poverty for the rest of our lives—we might live happily, peacefully together somewhere, if this unnatural love of peril had not bitten you to the bone. ‘One more contest,’ you will keep on saying; ‘one more revenge I am bound to give this and that or the other man whom I have beaten, or who has challenged me.’” Her bosom heaved, and the ivory paleness of her face was darkened with a rush of blood. “Honor is involved. You are bound in honor to keep your word to others, but free to deceive, to defraud, to cheat and lie to—your wife!”

“Take care what you’re saying!”

Sheldrick leaped out of his chair, fiery red and glaring angrily. Mrs. Sheldrick looked at him out of her glittering, narrowed eyes, and laughed, and her laugh was ugly to hear.

“Your wife! Did you ever realize what it meant to me to be your wife? When we were married, and for eighteen months after that! Heaven upon earth! Have you ever dreamed what sort of life began for me when you were first bitten by this craze of flying, three years

ago? Hell—sheer, unmitigated hell! To the public I am a woman in an ulster, or in a dust cloak and a silk motor veil, thick to hide the ghastly terror in my face!—a woman who kisses you before the start, and keeps pace with your aeroplane in an automobile through the long-distance flights, with what the English newspaper men describe as ‘unswerving devotion,’ and the French press correspondents term ‘a tenderness of the most touching.’ They are wrong! I am not conscious of any special devotion. The springs of tenderness have frozen in me. I am like every other spectator on the course, possessed, body and soul, by the secret, poignant, momentary expectation of seeing a man hurled to a horrible death. Only the man is—my husband! Now I remember this, Edgar, but a day will dawn—an hour will come to me—is coming as surely as there is a God in heaven—when he will be no more than the flying man who may possibly be killed!”

There was silence in the room, and the hoarse, dry sound that broke it was not a sob. It came from Sheldrick, a single utterance, like the sound of something breaking.

“I—understand!”

There was no response, for the woman, having unsealed and poured out the last drop of her vials of bitterness and wrath, was dumb. Sheldrick added, after a long pause:

“What do you ask? That I should give up the attempt to fly to Cherbourg? That I should break the engagement with the Aero Club—withdraw the challenge given to M. Ledru? Is that what you demand?”

She said with a hopeless gesture:

“I ask nothing! I demand nothing!”

Sheldrick muttered an oath. But in his soul he was yielding. "Aquila No. 1," "Aquila No. 2," and "Aquila No. 3" were dear to his soul. But he had awakened to the fact that his dearest possession was the love of his wife. And he had been killing it by inches. He met her eyes now—the stern gray eyes that had learned to see him as he was and look on the bare realities of life, shorn of its love glamour, and muttered:

"It is true. I have promised over and over. . . . And I owe it to you to take no more risks, even more than if we had a living child to . . . Where are those cable-forms?"

He strode to the ink-splashed writing table between the windows, and routed the bundle of greenish papers out of the frowsy blotting book, and dipped the blunt pen into the thick, dirty ink, and wrote:

"To Ledru, Hôtel National, Cherbourg, France.

"Unavoidably compelled break engagement——"

He was struck by a sudden idea, ceased writing, and left the room, going into the adjoining bedroom. His wife, standing dumb and frozen on the gaudy hearth rug near the empty grate, heard him rummaging for something. He came back in a few minutes with a heavy brow and preoccupied look, and took a leather strap from the pocket of the heavy overcoat he had thrown upon the sofa. With this he went back into the bedroom. The door handle rattled as though something were being hitched about it, the stout door groaned and creaked under a violent pull from the other side, there was a horrible, suggestive crack, and a stifled oath from Sheldrick. Next moment he was back in the room,

dipping the blunt pen into the bad ink, and finishing the cablegram:

“Left wrist badly sprained.—SHELDRIK, *Pavilion Hotel, Links, Greymouth, England.*”

Having finished writing, he brought the filled form to his wife. She read, and looked at him in eloquent silence. And, in answer to the question in her eyes, he held out his left hand, already swollen and purple, and with a swelling of the dimensions of a cricket ball, indicating the dislocated joint. A cry broke from her:

“Oh! how could you . . .”

“It was the easiest way,” said Sheldrick, flushed and scowling. “Call me a coward, if you like. I deserve it—as well as the other names!” He rang the bell, and fished with the sound hand for silver in a trouser pocket.

“We’ll send the cable now,” he said.

She bit her lips, that were no longer scarlet, and went to the blotted blotter, dipped the worn pen into the blobby ink, and made an alteration in the cablegram. Then she showed it to him, and the message ran:

“*To Ledru, Hôtel National, Cherbourg, France.*”

“Unavoidably compelled postpone engagement. Left wrist badly sprained.—SHELDRIK, *Pavilion Hotel, Links, Greymouth, England.*”

As Sheldrick looked at Mrs. Sheldrick, in intent amazement, the bell was answered by a German waiter. Mrs. Sheldrick took the silver out of Sheldrick’s sound hand, dismissed the attendant to dispatch the message,

closed and locked the door of the sitting-room against intruders, and then went quickly to her husband and fell upon his breast. He clasped her with his sound arm as she broke into passionate weeping, and only whispered when at last she lifted her face to his:

“Why ‘postponed’?”

“Because,” whispered Ella Sheldrick, with her cheek against her husband’s, “because you are not chained to your rock, my darling, with iron bars between you and the free fields of space, forged by the wife you love. You are free to give and take as many challenges as you desire. When you have finished ‘Aquila No. 4,’ that shall be built with a seat for a passenger beside you, run what risks you choose, brave as many dangers as seem good to you; I will not say one word, provided that I share the risk and brave the danger too.”

This is why the successful aviator Sheldrick never flies without a passenger. And the story has a moral—of a kind.

A FADED ROMANCE

IN TWO PARTS

I

THE ladies of the household at Charny-les-Bois usually sat in the library on sunny mornings. At the southern end of the long room, paneled in black walnut, and possessing a hooded stone fireplace of the fifteenth century, there was a bay, with wide glass doors opening upon a *perron* of wrought iron and copper work, which led down into the lovely garden—a piece of land originally reclaimed from the heart of the ancient beech forest, whose splendid somberness set off the dazzling whiteness of the *château* and made the parterres glow and sparkle like jewels—rubies, turquoises, emeralds, sapphires—poured out upon the green velvet lap of princess or courtesan.

The Marquis de Courvaux, lord of the soil and owner of the historic mansion, was absent. One must picture him leading the hunt through the forest alleys, attired in a maroon and yellow uniform of the most exquisite correctness, three-cocked hat, and immense spurred jack-boots, and accompanied by a field of fifty or sixty, of which every individual had turned out in a different costume: green corduroy knickerbockers with gold braid accompanying cut-away coats and jockey caps, and

bowlers of English make, sported in combination with pink and leathers, adding much to the kaleidoscopic effect. Half a dozen *cuirassiers* from the neighboring garrison town were upon their London coach, driving a scratch four-in-hand and attired in full uniform; various vehicles, of types ranging from the capacious *char-à-banc* to the landaulette, were laden with ardent votaries of the *chasse*.

The distant fanfare of the horns sounding the *ragot* reached the ears of the ladies sewing in the library at the *château*. One of these ladies, detained by urgent nursery reasons from joining in the morning's sport, was the young and pretty wife of the Marquis; the other, old as a high-bred French lady alone knows how to be, and still beautiful, was his mother. Over the high-arched cover of the great carved fireplace was her portrait by Varolan, painted at sixteen, in the full ball costume of 1870. One saw, regarding that portrait, that it was possible to be beautiful in those days even with a chignon and waterfall, even with panniers or bustle, and absurd trimmings of the ham-frill type. Perhaps some such reflection passed through the calm mind behind the broad, white, unwrinkled forehead of Madame de Courvaux, as she removed her gold spectacles and lifted her eyes, darkly blue and brilliant still, to the exquisite childish flower face of the portrait. The autumn breeze coming in little puffs between the open *battants* of the glass doors, savoring of crushed thyme, late violets, moss, bruised beech leaves, and other pleasant things, stirred the thick, waving, gold-gray tresses under the rich lace, a profusion of which, with the charming coquetry of a venerable beauty, the grandmamma of the chubby young gentleman upstairs in the nursery, the thirteen-year-old

schoolboy on his hunting pony, and the budding belle but newly emancipated from her convent, was fond of wearing—sometimes tied under her still lovely chin, sometimes floating loosely over her shoulders.

“There again!” The younger Madame de Courvaux arched her mobile eyebrows and showed her pretty teeth as she bit off a thread of embroidery cotton. “The third time you have looked at that portrait within ten minutes! Tell me, do you think it is getting stained with smoke? In north winds this chimney does not always behave itself, and Frédéric’s cigars and pipes——” The speaker shrugged her charming shoulders. “But he is incorrigible, as thou knowest, *Maman*.”

“I was not thinking of Frédéric or the chimney.” The elder lady smiled, still looking upward at the girlish face overhead. “It occurred to me that forty years have passed since I gave Carlo Varolan the first sitting for that portrait. His studio in the Rue Vernet was a perfect museum of lovely things. . . . I was never tired of examining them. . . . My *gouvernante* fell asleep in a great tapestry chair. . . . Varolan drew a caricature of her—so laughable!—with a dozen strokes of the charcoal on the canvas, and then rubbed it all out with a grave expression that made me laugh more. I was only just sixteen, and going to be married in a fortnight. . . . And I could laugh like that!” The antique brooch of black pearls and pigeons’ blood rubies that fastened the costly laces upon the bosom of Madame la Marquise rose and fell at the bidding of a sigh.

“I cried for days and days before my marriage with Frédéric,” the little Marquise remarked complacently.

“And I should cry at the bare idea of not being married at all!” said a fresh young voice, belonging to

Mademoiselle Lucie, who came up the steps from the garden with the skirt of her cambric morning frock full of autumn roses, her cheeks flushed to the hue of the pinkest La France. She dropped her pretty reverence to her grandmother, kissed her upon the hand, and her mother on the forehead, and turned her lapful of flowers out upon the table, where vases and bowls of Sèvres and China ware stood to receive them, ready filled with water. "You know I would, Grandmamma!"

"It is a mistake either to laugh or to weep; one should smile only, or merely sigh," said Grandmamma, with the charming air of philosophy that so became her. "One should neither take life too much to heart, nor make a jest of it, my little Lucie."

"Please go on with the story. Your *gouvernante* was asleep in the chair; Monsieur Varolan caricatured her. You were laughing at the drawing and at his droll face, as he rubbed it out, and then——"

"Then a gentleman arrived, and I did not laugh any more." Grandmamma took up her work, a delicate, spidery web of tatting, and the corners of her delicately chiseled lips, pink yet as faded azalea blossoms, quivered a little. "He was staying at the British Embassy with his brother-in-law, who was Military Attaché, and whose name I have forgotten. He came to see his sister's portrait; it stood framed upon the easel—oh! but most beautiful and stately, with the calm, cold gaze, the strange poetic glamour of the North. He, too, was fair, very tall, with aquiline features, and light hazel eyes, very piercing in their regard, and yet capable of expressing great tenderness. For Englishmen I have never cared, but Scotch gentlemen of high breeding have always appeared to me quite unapproachable in *ton*, much

like the Bretons of old blood, with whom their type, indeed, has much in common. But I am prosing quite intolerably, it seems to me!" said Grandmamma, with a heightened tint upon her lovely old cheeks and an embarrassed laugh.

Both Lucie and the little Marquise cried out in protestation. Lucie, snipping dead leaves from her roses, wanted to know whether Monsieur Varolan had presented the strange Scotch gentleman to Grandmamma.

"He did. At first he seemed to hesitate, glancing toward Mademoiselle Binet. But she slept soundly, and, indeed, with cause, having over-eaten herself that day at the twelve o'clock breakfast upon duck stewed with olives, pastry, and corn salad. An excellent creature, poor Binet, but with the failings of *ces gens-là*, and you may be assured that I did not grudge her her repose while I conversed with Monsieur Angus Dunbar, who spoke French almost to perfection. How it was that I, who had been brought up by my mother with such absolute strictness, yielded to the entreaties of Monsieur Varolan, who was quite suddenly inspired with the idea of what afterward proved to be one of his greatest pictures, I cannot imagine," said Grandmamma; "but it is certain that we posed together as the Lord of Nann and the Korrigan standing in the forest by the enchanted well. It would have been a terrible story to travel home to the Faubourg St. Germain, I knew, but Mademoiselle still slept sweetly, and out of girlish recklessness and *gaieté de cœur* I consented, and down came my long ropes of yellow hair, which had only been released from their schoolroom plait, and dressed in grown young-lady fashion six months before. Monsieur Varolan cried out, and clasped his hands in his impulsive southern way.

Monsieur Dunbar said nothing—then; but by his eyes one could tell, child as one was, that he was pleased. But when Varolan's sketch was dashed in, and the painter cried to us to descend from the model's platform, Monsieur Dunbar leaned toward me and whispered, as he offered me his hand, 'If the fairy had been as beautiful as you, Mademoiselle'—for Varolan had told him the story, and he had pronounced it to be the parallel of an antique Highland legend—'had the fairy been as beautiful as you, the Lord of Nann would have forgotten the lady in the tower by the sea.' He, as I have told you, my children, spoke French with great ease and remarkable purity; and something in the earnestness of his manner and the expression of his eyes—those light hazel, gleaming eyes"—Grandmamma's delicate dove-colored silks rustled as she shuddered slightly—"caused me a thrill, but a thrill——"

"Young girls are so absurdly impressionable," began the little Marquise, with a glance at Lucie. "I remember when our dancing master, hideous old M. Mouton, praised me for executing my steps with elegance, I would be in the seventh heaven."

"But this man was neither hideous, old, nor a dancing master, my dear," said Grandmamma, a little annoyed. She took up her tatting, which had dropped upon her silver-gray lap, as though the story were ended, and Lucie's face fell.

"And is that all—absolutely all?" she cried.

"Mademoiselle Binet woke up, and we went home to the Faubourg St. Germain to five o'clock tea—then the latest novelty imported from London; and she overate herself again—upon hot honey cake buttered to excess—

and spoiled her appetite for supper," said Grandmamma provokingly.

"And you never saw Monsieur Varolan or Monsieur D . . . —I cannot pronounce his name—again?"

"Monsieur Varolan I saw again, several times in fact, for the portrait required it; and Monsieur Dunbar, quite by accident, called at the studio on several of these occasions."

"And Mademoiselle Binet? Did she always fall asleep in the tapestry chair?" asked the little Marquise, with arching eyebrows.

Grandmamma laughed, and her laugh was so clear, so sweet, and so mirthful that the almost living lips of the exquisite child portrayed upon the canvas bearing the signature of the dead Varolan seemed to smile in sympathy.

"No, but she was occupied for all that. Monsieur Varolan had found out her weakness for confectionery, and there was always a large dish of chocolate *pralines* and cream puffs for her to nibble at after that first sitting. Poor, good creature, she conceived an immense admiration for Varolan; and Monsieur Dunbar treated her with a grave courtesy which delighted her. She had always imagined Scotchmen as savages, painted blue and feeding upon raw rabbits, she explained, until she had the happiness of meeting him."

"And he—what brought him from his bogs and mountains?" asked the little Marquise. "Was he qualifying for the diplomatic service, or studying art?"

Grandmamma turned her brilliant eyes calmly upon the less aristocratic countenance of her daughter-in-law. "He was doing neither. He was staying in Paris in attendance upon his *fiancée*, who had come over to buy her

trousseau. I forget her name—she was the only daughter of a baronet of Leicestershire, and an heiress. The match had been made by her family. Monsieur Dunbar, though poor, being the cadet of a great family and heir to an ancient title—his brother, Lord Hailhope, having in early youth sustained an accident in the gymnasium which rendered him a cripple for life.”

“So a wife with a ‘dot’ was urgently required!” commented the little Marquise. “Let us hope she was not without *esprit* and a certain amount of good looks, in the interests of Monsieur Dunbar.”

“I saw her on the night of my first ball,” said Grandmamma, laying down her tatting and folding her delicate, ivory-tinted hands, adorned with a few rings of price, upon her dove-colored silk lap. “She had sandy hair, much drawn back from the forehead, and pale eyes of china-blue, with the projecting teeth which the caricatures of ‘Cham’ gave to all Englishwomen. Also, her waist was rather flat, and her satin boots would have fitted a *sapeur*; but she had an agreeable expression, and I afterward heard her married life with Monsieur Dunbar was fairly happy.”

“And Monsieur himself—was he as happy with her as—as he might have been, supposing he had never visited Paris—never called at the studio of Varolan?” asked the little Marquise, with a peculiar intonation.

Grandmamma’s rosary was of beautiful pearls. She let the shining things slide through her fingers meditatively as she replied:

“My daughter, I cannot say. We met at that ball—the last ball given at the Tuileries before the terrible events of the fifteenth of July. I presented Monsieur Dunbar to my mother. We danced together, conversed

lightly of our prospects; I felt a *serrement de cœur*, and he, Monsieur Dunbar, was very pale, with a peculiar expression about the eyes and mouth which denoted violent emotion strongly repressed. I had noticed it when Monsieur de Courvaux came to claim my hand for the second State quadrille. He wore his uniform as Minister of Commerce and all his Orders. . . . His thick nose, white whiskers, dull eyes, and bent figure contrasted strangely with the fine features and splendid physique of Monsieur Dunbar. Ah, Heaven! how I shivered as he smiled at me with his false teeth, and pressed my hand within his arm. . . . He filled me with fear. And yet at heart I knew him to be good and disinterested and noble, even while I could have cried out to Angus to save me. . . . But I was whirled away. Everyone was very kind. The Empress, looking tall as a goddess, despotically magnificent in the plenitude of her charms, noticed me kindly. I danced with the Prince Imperial, a fresh-faced, gentle boy. Monsieur de Courvaux was much felicitated upon his choice, and *Maman* was pleased—that goes without saying. Thus I came back to Monsieur Dunbar. We were standing together in an alcove adorned with palms, admiring the porphyry vase, once the property of Catherine the Great, and given by the Emperor Alexander to the First Napoleon, when for the first time he took my hand. If I could paint in words the emotion that suddenly overwhelmed me! . . . It seemed as though the great personages, the distinguished crowds, the jeweled ladies, the uniformed men, vanished, and the lustres and girandoles went out, and Angus and I were standing in pale moonlight on the shores of a lake encircled by mountains, looking in each other's eyes. It matters little what we said, but the his-

tory of our first meeting might have prompted the sonnet of Arvers. . . . You recall it:

“Mon cœur a son secret, mon âme a son mystère,
Un amour éternel dans un instant conçu:
Le mal est sans remède.”

Sans remède for either of us. Honor was engaged on either side. So we parted,” said Grandmamma. “My bouquet of white tea-roses and ferns had lost a few buds when I put it in water upon reaching home.”

“And——”

“In three days I married Monsieur de Courvaux. As for Monsieur Dunbar——”

“Lucie,” said the little Marquise, “run down to the bottom of the garden and listen for the horns!”

“Monsieur Dunbar I never saw again,” said Grandmamma, with a smile, “and there is no need for Lucie to run into the garden. Listen! One can hear the horns quite plainly; the boar has taken to the open—they are sounding the *débuché*. What do you want, Lebas?”

The middle-aged, country-faced house steward was the medium of a humble entreaty on the part of one Auguste Pichon, a forest keeper, that Madame the Marquise would deign to hear him on behalf of the young woman, his sister, of whom Monsieur le Curé had already spoken. This time, upon the exchange of a silent intelligence between the two elder ladies, Mademoiselle Lucie was really dismissed to the garden, and Pichon and his sister were shown in by Lebas.

Pichon was a thick-set, blue-bearded, vigorous fellow of twenty-seven, wearing a leather gun pad strapped over his blouse, and cloth gaiters. He held his cap in both hands against his breast as he bowed to his

master's mother and his master's wife. His sister, a pale, sickly, large-eyed little creature, scarcely ventured to raise her abashed glance from the Turkey carpet as Pichon plucked at her cotton sleeve.

"We have heard the story from Monsieur le Curé," cried the younger lady, "and both Madame la Marquise and myself are much shocked and grieved. Is it not so, Madame?"

Grandmamma surveyed the bending, tempest-beaten figure before her with a sternness of the most august, yet with pity and interest too.

"We did not anticipate when we had the pleasure of contributing a little sum to your sister's dower, upon her marriage with the under-gardener, Pierre Michaud, that the union would be attended with anything but happiness."

"Alas! Nor did I, Madame. . . . I picked out Michaud myself from half a dozen others. 'Here's a sound, hale man of sixty,' thinks I, 'will make the girl a good husband, and leave her a warm widow when he dies'; for he has a bit put by, as is well known. And she was willing when he asked her to go before the Maire and Monsieur le Curé and sign herself Michaud instead of Pichon. Weren't you, girl?"

No answer from the culprit but a sob.

"So, as she was willing and Michaud was eager, the wedding came off. At the dance, for it's a poor foot that doesn't hop at a wedding, what happens? Latrace, Monsieur le Marquis's new groom, drops in. He dances with the bride, drops a few sweet speeches in her ear. Crac! 'Tis like sowing mustard and cress. . . . Latrace scrapes acquaintance with Michaud—more fool he, with respect to the ladies' presence, for when one has a drop of honey

one doesn't care to share with the wasp! Latrace takes to hanging about the cottage. Ninette, the silly thing, begins to gape at the moon, and when what might be expected to happen happens, Michaud turns her out of house and home. What's more, keeps her dowry, to pay for his honor, says he. 'Honor! leave honor to gentlemen; wipe out scores with a stick!' says I, 'and eat one's cabbage soup in peace.' But he'll bolt the door and stick to the dowry, and Ninette may beg, or worse, for all he cares. And my wife flies out on the poor thing; and what to do with her may the good God teach me. . . . Madame will understand that who provides for her keeps two! And she so young, Madame, only seventeen!"

The little Marquise uttered a pitying exclamation, and over the face of the elder lady passed a swift change. The exquisite faded lips quivered, the brilliant eyes under the worn eyelids shone through a liquid veil of tears. Rustling in her rich neutral-tinted silks, Madame rose, went to the shrinking figure, and stooping from her stately height, kissed Ninette impulsively upon both cheeks.

"Poor child! Poor little one!" whispered Grandmamma; and at the caress and the whisper, the girl dropped upon her knees with a wild, sobbing cry, and hid her face in the folds of what seemed to her an angel's robe. "Leave Ninette to us, my good Pichon," said Grandmamma. "For the present the Sisters of the Convent at Charny will take her, all expenses being guaranteed by me, and when she is stronger we will talk of what is to be done." She raised the crying girl, passing a gentle hand over the bowed head and the convulsed shoulders. "Life is not all ended because one has made

one mistake!" said Grandmamma. "Tell Madame Pichon that, from me!"

Pichon, crushing his cap, bowed and stammered gratitude, and backed out, leading the girl, who turned upon the threshold to send one passionate glance of gratitude from her great, melancholy, black eyes at the beautiful stately figure with the gold-gray hair, clad in shining silks and costly lace. As the door closed upon the homely figures, the little Marquise heaved a sigh of relief.

"Ouf! Pitiab!e as it all is, one can hardly expect anything better. The standard of morality is elevated in proportion to the standard of rank, the caliber of intellect, the level of refinement. Do you not agree with me?"

Grandmamma smiled. "Are we of the upper world so extremely moral?"

The little Marquise pouted.

"*Noblesse oblige* is an admirable apothegm, but does it keep members of our order from the Courts of Divorce? My dear Augustine, reflect, and you will come to the conclusion that there is really very little difference in human beings. The texture of the skin, the shape of the fingernails, cleanliness, correct grammar, and graceful manners do not argue superior virtue, or greater probity of mind, or increased power to resist temptation, but very often the reverse. This poor girl married an uninteresting, elderly man at the very moment when her heart awakened at the sight and the voice of one whom she was destined to love. . . . Circumstances, environments, opportunities contributed to her defeat; but I will answer for it she has known moments of abnegation as lofty, struggles as desperate, triumphs of con-

science over instinct as noble, as delicate, and as touching as those experienced by any Lucretia of the Rue Tronchet or the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. She has been beaten, that is all, worsted in the conflict; and it is for us, who are women like herself, to help her to rise. But I prose," said Grandmamma; "I sound to myself like a dull tract or an indifferent sermon. And Lucie must be getting tired of the garden!"

Grandmamma moved toward the open *battants* of the glass doors to call Mademoiselle, but arrested her steps to answer the interrogation which rose in the eyes, but never reached the lips, of the little Marquise. "I have said, my dear, that we never met again. Whether Monsieur Angus Dunbar was nobler and stronger than other men—whether I was braver and purer than others of my sex—this was a question which never came to the test. Fate kept us apart, and something in which Monsieur le Curé, and perhaps ourselves, would recognize the hand of Heaven!"

Grandmamma went out through the glass doors and stood upon the *perron*, breathing the delicious air. The sun was drowning in a sea of molten gold, the sweet clamor of the horns came from an island in the shallow river. "Gone to the water! Gone to the water!" they played. . . . And then the death of the boar was sounded in the *hallali*. But a nobler passion than that of the hunter, who follows and slays for the mere momentary lust of possession, shone in the exquisite old face that lifted to the sunset the yearning of a deathless love.

II

The boar, a *ragot*, had met his end at the point of the Marquis's hunting knife, an ancestral *couteau de chasse* with a blade about three feet long. The field had dispersed, one or two of the *valets de chien* gone after the missing hounds, leading the decoy dogs on leashes. Afternoon tea at the *château* was a very lively affair, the clatter of tongues, cups, and teaspoons almost deafening. A *cuirassier*, whose polished boot had suffered abrasion from the tusk of the wounded animal, recounted his adventure to a circle of sympathetic ladies. A fire of beech logs blazed on the wide hearth, the leaping flames playing a color symphony, from peacock green to sapphire, from ruby to orange, dying into palest lemon-yellow, leaping up in lilac, deepening to violet, and so *da capo*. . . . The silver andirons had sphinx heads adorned with full-bottomed periwigs of the period of Louis le Grand. . . . The exquisite Watteaus and Bouchers, set in the paneling—painted white because the little Marquise had found oak so *triste*—shone with a subdued splendor. The perfume of fine tobacco, green tea, and many roses, loaded the atmosphere, producing a mild intoxication in the brain of the tall, fair, well-dressed young fellow, unmistakably British, whom a servant had announced as Monsieur Brown. . . .

"Monsieur Brown?" Monsieur de Courvaux read the card passed over to him by his wife. "Who under the sun is Monsieur Brown?"

"Fie, Frédéric!" rebuked the little Marquise. "It is the English tutor!"

Then they rose together and welcomed the newcomer

with hospitable warmth. Charny les Bois was hideously difficult of access; the railway from the junction at which one had to change was a single line, and a perfect disgrace. Monsieur de Courvaux had long intended to bring the question—a burning one—before the proper authorities. Both Monsieur and Madame were horrified to realize that Monsieur Brown had walked from the station, where cabs were conspicuous by their absence. A conveyance had been ordered to be sent, but at the last moment it was wanted for the hunt. Monsieur Brown had hunted in England, of course?

Mr. Brown admitted that he had followed the hounds in several counties. Looking at the new tutor's square shoulders, sinewy frame, long, well-made limbs, and firmly knit, supple hands, tanned like his face and throat by outdoor exercise, Monsieur de Courvaux did not doubt it. Brown came of good race, that was clear at the first glance. Harrow and Oxford had added the *cachet* of the high public school and the university. He had recommendations from the Duke of Atholblair, who mentioned him as the son of a dear old friend. And Atholblair was of the old *régime*, a great nobleman who chose his friends with discretion. Clearly Brown would do. His French was singularly pure; his English was the English of the upper classes. Absolutely, Brown was the thing. He was, he said, a Scotchman. The late Queen of England, to whom the little Marquise had the honor of being god-daughter's daughter, had had a valuable attendant—also a Scotchman—of the name of Brown! Did Monsieur Brown happen to be any relation?

"Unhappily no, Madame!" said Mr. Brown, who seemed rather tickled by the notion. He took the next opportunity to laugh, and did it heartily. He was stand-

ing on the bearskin before the fireplace, measuring an equal six feet of height with Monsieur de Courvaux, when he laughed, and several people, grouped about a central figure—that of the elder Madame de Courvaux, who sat upon a gilt *fauteuil* with her back to the great windows, beyond which the fires of the sunset were burning rapidly away—the people glanced round.

“What a handsome Englishman!” a lady whispered, a tiny brunette, with eyes of jet and ebony hair, who consequently adored the hazel-eyed, the tawny-haired, the tall of the opposite sex. Madame de Courvaux, superb in her laces and dove-colored silks, sat like a figure of marble. Under her broad white brow, crowned by its waves of gray-gold hair, her eyes, blue and brilliant still, fixed with an intensity of regard almost devouring upon the face of the new tutor, whom the Marquis, stepping forward, presented to his mother with due ceremony, and to whom, offering her white, jeweled hand, she said:

“Welcome once more to France, Monsieur Dunbar!”

“But, Mamma,” put in Monsieur de Courvaux, as young Mr. Brown started and crimsoned to the roots of his tawny hair, “the name of Monsieur is Brown, and he has never before visited our country.”

“Monsieur Brown will pardon me!” Madame de Courvaux rose to her full height and swept the astonished young fellow a wonderful curtsy. “The old are apt to make mistakes. And—there sounds the dressing gong!”

Indeed, the metallic *tintamarre* of the instrument named began at that instant, and the great room emptied as the chatterers and tea drinkers scurried away. A rosy, civil footman in plain black livery showed Mr. Brown to his room, which was not unreasonably high

up, and boasted a dressing cabinet and a bath. As Brown hurriedly removed the smuts of the railway with oceans of soap and water, and got into his evening clothes—much too new and well cut for a tutor—he pondered. As he shook some attar of violets—much too expensive a perfume for a tutor, who, at the most, should content himself with Eau de Cologne of the ninepenny brand—upon his handkerchief, he shook his head.

“I’ll be shot if she didn’t, and plainly too! It wasn’t the confusion of the beastly all-night train journey from Paris. It wasn’t the clatter of French talk, or the delusion of a guilty conscience—decidedly not! The thing is as certain as it is inexplicable! I arrive under the name of Brown at a country house in a country I don’t know, belonging to people I have never met, and the second lady I am introduced to addresses me as Mr. Dunbar. There’s the second gong! I wonder whether there is a governess for me to take in, or whether I trot behind my superiors, who aren’t paid a hundred and fifty pounds a year to teach English?”

And Mr. Brown went down to dinner. Somewhat to his surprise, he was placed impartially, served without prejudice, and conversed with as an equal. The De Courvaux were charming people, their tutor thought—equal to the best-bred Britons he had ever met. His pupils—the freckled boy with hair cropped *à la brosse*, and the pretty, frank-mannered girl of sixteen—interested him. He was uncommonly obliged to the kind old Duke for his recommendation; the bread of servitude eaten under this hospitable roof would have no bitter herbs mingled with it, that was plain. He helped himself to an *entrée* of calves’ tongues stewed with mushrooms, as he thought this, and noted the violet bouquet

of the old Bordeaux with which one of the ripe-faced, black-liveried footmen filled his glass. And perhaps he thought of another table, at the bottom of which his place had been always laid, and of the grim, gaunt dining-room in which it stood, with the targets and breast-pieces, the chain and plate mail of his—Brown's—forebears winking against the deep lusterless black of the antique paneling; and, opposite, lost in deep reflection, the master of the house, moody, haggard, gray-moustached and gray-haired, but eminently handsome still, leaning his head upon his hand, and staring at the gold and ruby reflections of the wine decanters in the polished surface of the ancient oak, or staring straight before him at the portrait, so oddly out of keeping with the Lord Neils and Lord Ronalds in tartans and powdered wigs, the Lady Agnes and the Lady Jean in hoops and stomachers, with their hair dressed over cushions, and shepherds' crooks in their narrow, yellowish hands. . . . That portrait, of an exquisite girl—a lily-faced, gold-haired, blue-eyed child in the ball costume of 1870—had been the object of Mr. Brown's boyish adoration. Varolan painted it, Mr. Brown's uncle—whose name was no more Brown than his nephew's—had often said. And on one occasion, years previously, he had expanded sufficiently to tell his nephew and expectant heir that the original of the portrait was the daughter of a ducal family of France, a star moving in the social orbit of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, married to a Minister of the Imperial Government a few weeks previous to that Government's collapse and fall.

"I believe the dear old boy must have been in love with her before Uncle Ronald died, and he came in for the family honors," mused Mr. Brown, and then began

to wonder whether he had treated the dear old boy badly or *vice versa*. For between this uncle and nephew, who, despite a certain chilly stiffness and rigor of mental bearing, often mutually exhibited by relations, were sincerely attached to each other, a breach had opened, an estrangement had occurred. Hot words and bitter reproaches had suddenly, unexpectedly been exchanged, old wrongs flaming up at a kindling word, forgotten grudges coming to light in the blaze of the conflagration. . . .

And so it had come to pass that the son of Lord Hailhope's younger brother, named Angus after his uncle, had not been thrown, had hurled himself upon his own resources. And the Duke of Atholblair had found him the place of English tutor in the family of Madame de Courvaux.

"It is the only thing that presents itself," the aged peer had explained, "and therefore, my dear boy, you had better take it until something better turns up."

For the present. But the future? Mr. Brown wondered whether he and the English grammar and lexicon—the phrase book, dictionary, and the other volumes which constituted his tutorial equipment—were doomed to grow gray and dog's-eared, drooping and shabby together?

Then he looked up, for some one touched him upon the arm.

"The ladies permit us to smoke in the library, which is the best room for music in the house," said the pleasant voice of Monsieur de Courvaux; "so we will take our *café* and *chasse* in their company, if you please."

Mr. Brown reached the door in time to open it, and to comprehend that the act of gallantry was not expected of him. And the feminine paroquets and the

sable-coated male rooks went by, and Mademoiselle Lucie gave the handsome, well-groomed Englishman a shy glance of approval from under her black eyelashes, and Monsieur Frédéric, puffy with incipient indigestion, grinned feebly. Brown put his hand upon the boy's shoulder, and followed the rest.

"You don't want me to do any English to-night, do you, Monsieur Brown?" young hopeful insinuated, as they went into the long walnut-paneled room with another bay at the southern end with blinds undrawn, revealing a wonderful panorama of moonlit forest and river and champaign. "I can say 'all-a-raight!' 'wat-a-rot!' and 'daddle-doo!' already," the youth continued. "The English groom of papa, I learned the words of him, *voyez!* You shall know Smeet, to-morrow!"

"Thanks, old fellow!" said Mr. Brown, with a good-humored smile.

"Grandmamma is making a sign that you are to go and speak to her, Monsieur," said Mademoiselle Lucie, Brown's elder pupil-elect. "Everybody in this house obeys Grandmamma, and so must you. Mamma says it is because she was so beautiful when she was young—*young*, you comprehend, as in that portrait over the fireplace—that everybody fell down and worshiped her. And she is beautiful now, is she not, sir? Not as the portrait; but——"

"The portrait, Mademoiselle? . . . Over the fireplace. . . . Good Lord, what an extraordinary likeness!" broke from Mr. Brown. For the counterpart of the exquisite picture of Varolan that had hung in the dining hall of the gray old northern castle where Mr. Brown's boyhood, youth, and earliest manhood had been

spent, hung above the hooded fifteenth-century fireplace of the noble library of this French château.

There she stood, the golden, slender, lily-faced, sapphire-eyed young aristocrat of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, with her indefinable air of pride and hauteur and exclusiveness mingled with girlish merriment and mischief. And there she sat—the original in the flesh—Madame la Marquise de Courvaux, the Grandmamma of these young people—regal in sweeping folds of amethyst velvet and wonderful creamy Spanish point lace.

Obedient to the bidding of her fan, Mr. Brown crossed the library and took the chair she indicated near her. And the diamond cross upon her still beautiful bosom moved quickly, with the beating of Grandmamma's heart, as he did this.

"How like he is!—how like!" she whispered to herself; and the electric lights became crystal girandoles, and the library became a ballroom at the Tuileries. The Empress, beautiful and cold, passed down the ranks of curtsyng, bare-backed, bejeweled women and bowing, gold-laced men. Monsieur de Courvaux, with his orders, his bald forehead, and his white whiskers, released mademoiselle at the claim of a tall, tawny-haired, hazel-eyed, fair-faced partner, a Highland gentleman, in plaid and philabeg, with sporran and claymore, the antique gold brooch upon his shoulder set with ancient amethysts, river pearls and cairngorms. And he told her how he loved her, there in the alcove of palms, and heard her little confession that, had she not been bound by a promise of marriage to Monsieur de Courvaux she would—oh, how gladly!—become the wife of Monsieur Angus Dunbar.

"As you say. . . . Fate has been cruel to both of us.

. . . And—and I am engaged. She lives in Leicestershire. I met her one hunting season. She is in Paris, staying at Meurice's with her mother now. They're buying the trousseau. . . . God help me!" groaned Angus Dunbar.

But the little lady of the Faubourg Saint-Germain drew back the hand he snatched at, and swept him a haughty little curtsy, looking straight in his face: "The State Quadrille is beginning. Be so good as to take me to Mamma. . . . And I wish you all happiness, sir, and your *fiancée* also." Another little curtsy he got, poor lad, with her "Adieu, and a thousand thanks, Monsieur!" and then—he walked the dusty streets of Paris until morning; while Mademoiselle lay sleepless on her tear-drenched lace pillows. And——

Grandmamma awakened as though from a dream, to meet the frank hazel eyes of Mr. Brown, the English tutor.

"Monsieur will forgive the curiosity of an old woman," she said, with her inimitable air of grace and sweetness. "I wished to ask whether you were not of Northern race—a Scot, for example? Yes? Ah, I thought I had guessed correctly. The type is not to be mistaken, and I once had—a dear friend!—whom Monsieur resembles to identity. But his name was not Brown."

"I was within an ace of telling her mine was not, either," reflected the English tutor as, an hour or so later, he got into bed. "How perfectly beautiful Madame—not the *agaçante, espiègle* little Madame, but the old one—must have been in the rich prime of her womanhood! Did she and my uncle ever meet again, I wonder? No, I should think not. The dear old boy is just the sort of character to hug a romance all his life, and she—she is

just the woman to be the heroine of one. Are all French country-house beds in this style, and is one supposed to draw these rosebudded chintz curtains modestly round one, or let them alone?" Mr. Brown concluded to let them alone, and fell very soundly asleep.

At the late breakfast, an elaborate meal, beginning with soup and fish, and ending with tea and cakes, it was explained to the tutor that no English lesson was to be given that day, as a costume ball of the calico type was to take place that evening, and the children's study, a homely, comfortable little wainscoted parlor on the ground floor, looking out upon a grass-grown courtyard with a bronze fountain in the middle, was to be given up to hats, coats, and opera cloaks. Monsieur Frédéric was to personate one of his own ancestors, page to the Duke of Burgundy, killed in a jousting match in 1369, Monsieur le Marquis and Madame respectively appearing as the Chevalier de Courvaux and his lady, parents of the youth referred to, represented in a miniature by Othea. Mademoiselle Lucie chose to be "Undine" in gauze and water-lilies. For Monsieur Brown a character could surely be found, a costume devised, even at the eleventh hour. There were jack-boots, *salades*, and coats of mail innumerable in the great hall. Mr. Brown, who shared the objection of his British countrymen to being made to appear ridiculous, shook his head. He preferred not to dress up; but he had, or thought he had, packed away in one of his portmanteaux (which were too numerous for a tutor) something that would do. A Highland costume, in fact, of the modified kind worn by gentlemen of Caledonia as dinner dress or upon occasions of festivity.

Thus Mr. Brown unconsciously pledged himself to

bring about a crisis in the lives of two people, one of whom was actively engaged at that moment in trying to find him. For Lord Hailhope was genuinely attached to his nephew, and the basis of the quarrel between them, never very secure, had been shaken and shattered, firstly, by the indifference manifested by the young lady concerned, a rather plain young heiress, at the news of the said nephew's disappearance, and, secondly, by her marriage with her father's chaplain, a Presbyterian divine of thunderous eloquence and sweeping predestinatory convictions.

"Tell him that I was in the wrong—that I apologize—that everything shall be as it was before, if he will come back! The money shall be secured to him; I will guarantee that," Lord Hailhope wrote to the London solicitor employed in the search for Young Lochinvar, who had sprung to the saddle and ridden away—without the lady. "If he will not come to me, I will go to him. The insult *was* gross; I admit it, and will atone to the best of my ability!"

"The hot-headed old Highlander!" commented the man of law, as he filed the letter. "He adopts the boy—his dead brother's son—brings him up in the expectation of inheriting his private fortune as well as the title, and then turns him out of doors because he won't marry a girl with teeth like tombstones and a fancy for another man. If Master Angus Dunbar is wise, he will hold out against going back until that question of the money has been disposed of irrevocably. Though people never have sense—lucky for my profession!"

Meanwhile, at Charny les Bois preparations for the ball—the materials of which owed much more to the lordly silkworm than the plebeian cotton pod—went on

apace. Evening came, the band of the *cuirassiers*, generously lent by Monsieur the Colonel, drove over from the barracks in a couple of *chars-à-bancs*, the Colonel and the officers of that gallant regiment, arrayed to kill in the green and gold costumes of the hunt of the Grand Monarque, followed upon their English *drague*. *Voitures* of every description disgorged their happy loads. Monsieur, Madame, the young ladies and the young gentlemen, hot, happy, smiling, and fearfully and wonderfully disguised.

"Their unconsciousness, the entire absence of the conviction that they are ridiculous, makes them quite lovable," thought Mr. Brown. "That fat, fair papa, with spectacles and large sandy whiskers, as Pluton, from *Orphée aux Enfers*, in red satin tunic and black silk tights spotted with yellow, a satin cloak with a train, a gilt pasteboard crown and trident pleases me tremendously. He is, I believe, a magistrate from Charny. His wife is the even fatter and fairer lady attired as Norma, and those three little dumpy girls, flower girls of a period decidedly uncertain."

"Does not Monsieur dance?" said Mademoiselle Lucie, looking, with her filmy green draperies, her fair locks crowned, and her slim waist girdled with water-lilies and forget-me-nots, a really exquisite river sprite.

"If Mademoiselle would accord me the honor of her hand in a valse," Mr. Brown began; then he broke off, remembering that in England the tutor did not usually dance with the daughters of the house—if, indeed, that functionary danced at all. But——

"Mamma has been telling me that Englishmen dance badly," observed Mademoiselle, with a twinkle in her blue eyes. "Grandmamma will have it, by the way, that

you are Scotch! Do not look round for her; she was a little fatigued by so much conversation and fuss, and will not come down to-night. . . . Heavens! look at Frédéric," she added, in a tone of sisterly solicitude, as the page of the Court of Burgundy moved unsteadily into sight, clinging to the arm of a bosom friend in a "celadon" costume and a condition of similar obfuscation. "Alas! I comprehend!" she continued. "Those plums conserved in cognac have a fatal fascination for my unhappy brother. Quick, Monsieur! make to remove him from the view of Papa, or the consequences will be of the most terrible. . . . Frédéric has been already warned. . . ."

And outwardly grave and sympathetic, albeit splitting with repressed laughter, Mr. Brown went in chase of the unseasoned vessels, and conveyed them to the safe harbor of the small study on the second floor, which had been allotted to him as a den. Locking them in, he was about to descend in search of seltzer water, when, in the act of crossing the gallery, unlighted save for the dazzling moonlight that poured through the long mullioned windows, giving a strange semblance of fantastic life to the dark family portraits on the opposite wall, and lying in silver pools upon the shining parquet islanded with threadbare carpets of ancient Oriental woof, he encountered the elder Madame de Courvaux, who came swiftly toward him from the opposite end of a long gallery, carrying a light and a book that looked like a Catholic breviary. With the glamour of moonlight upon her, in a loose silken dressing robe trimmed with the priceless lace she affected, her wealth of golden-gray tresses in two massive plaits, drawn forward and hanging over her bosom, almost to her knees, her beauty was marvelous.

Mr. Brown caught his breath and stopped short; Madame, on her part, uttered a faint cry—was it of delight or of terror?—and would have dropped her candle had not the tutor caught it and placed it on a *console* that stood near.

“Pardon, Madame!” he was beginning, when . . .

“Oh, Angus Dunbar! Angus, my beloved, my adored!” broke from Madame de Courvaux. “There is no need that either of us should ask for pardon.” Her blue eyes gleamed like sapphires, her still beautiful bosom heaved and panted, her lips smiled, though the great tears brimmed one by one over her underlids and chased down her pale cheeks. “We did what was right. The path of honor was never easy. You married, and I also, and all these years no news of you has reached me. But I understand now that you are dead, and bound no longer by the vows of earth, and that you have come, brave as of old, beautiful as of old, to tell me that you are free!”

With an impulse never quite to be accounted for, Angus Dunbar, the younger, stepped forward and enclosed in his own warm, living grasp Madame’s trembling hands. . . .

“My name is Angus Dunbar, Madame,” he said, “but—but I believe you must be speaking of my uncle. He succeeded to the peerage twenty years ago; he is now Lord Hailhope, but he—he never married, though I believe he loved, very sincerely and devotedly, a lady whose portrait by Varolan hangs in the dining-room at Hailhope, just as it hangs in the library here at Charny les Bois.”

“I—I do not understand. . . . How comes it that——” Madame hesitated piteously, her hands wringing each other, her great wistful eyes fixed upon the

splendid, stalwart figure of the young man. "You are so like. . . . And the costume——"

"It is customary for Highland gentlemen to wear the kilt at social functions; and when I left Hailhope—or, rather, was turned out of doors, for my uncle disowned me when I refused to marry a girl who did not care for me, and who has since married to please herself—Gregor packed it in one of my kit cases. The cat is out of the bag as well as the kilt. . . . I came here as English tutor to your grandchildren, Madame, at the suggestion of an old friend, the Duke of Atholblair, to whom I told the story of the quarrel with my uncle."

Madame began to recover her courtly grace and self-possession. Her hands ceased to tremble in Dunbar's clasp; she drew them away with a smile that was only a little fluttered.

"And I took you for a ghost . . . a *revenant*. . . . I was a little agitated. . . . I had been suffering from an attack of the nerves. . . . Monsieur will make allowances for a superstitious old woman. To-morrow, after breakfast, in the garden Monsieur will explain the whole story to me—how it came that Monsieur Dunbar, his uncle, now Lord Hailhope—ah, yes! there was a crippled elder brother of that title—disowned his nephew for refusing to give his hand to one he did not love. . . . I should have imagined—— Good-night, Monsieur!"

In the garden, after breakfast, Angus Dunbar, no longer handicapped by the plebeian name of Brown, told his story to a sympathetic listener. Madame's head was bent—perhaps her hearing was not so good as it had been when, more than forty years previously, Angus Dunbar, the elder, had whispered his secret in that delicate ear. But as footsteps sounded upon the terrace, and

one of the fresh-faced, black-liveried footmen appeared, piloting a stranger, a tall, somewhat stern-featured, gray-moustached gentleman, she started and looked round. In the same moment the late Mr. Brown jumped up, over-setting his chair, the pugs barked, and——

“I owed it to you to make the first move,” said Lord Hailhope, rather huskily, as the uncle and nephew grasped hands. “Forgive me, Angus, my dear boy!”

“Lady Grisel has married the Presbyterian minister, sir, and we’re all going to be happy for ever after, like people in a fairy tale,” said Angus Dunbar. Then he turned to Madame de Courvaux, and bowed with his best grace. “Madame, permit me to present my uncle, Lord Hailhope, who I believe has had the honor of meeting you before!”

And, being possessed of a degree of discretion quite proper and desirable in a tutor, Mr. Angus Dunbar moved away in the direction of a rose walk, down which Mademoiselle Lucie’s white gown had flitted a moment before, leaving the two old lovers looking in each other’s eyes.

AN INDIAN BABY

WHEN old Lovelace-Legge sank into a stertorous final coma which his lovely marble tombstone called by a much prettier name, and the blinds were drawn up after a decent interval, and a tremendous heraldic joke, furnished by Heralds' College, was dismounted from over the front door, Mrs. Lovelace-Legge, after the requisite period of seclusion, took an exquisite little gem of a house in Sloane Street, furnished it to a marvel, and began, with discreetness, to enjoy herself. All her affairs flourished, her pet plans prospered, her gratifications were many, her disappointments nil; people began to call her "Lucky Lotta Legge." She took her good fortune as her due.

"Perhaps she feels she deserves something of Providence for putting up patiently with old Lovelace-Legge during those ten awful years," said Lady Cranberry, her dearest friend, to another just a shade less dear, as they walked up Sloane Street one fine morning.

"I suppose he *was* awful?" hazarded the second-best beloved.

Lady Cranberry crumpled her eyebrows. "He had a complexion like New Zealand meat," she said. "Next time you walk up the King's Road with Lotta, watch her as you pass a cheap butcher's shop. She will wince and look the other way, and you may guess what she is thinking of, poor darling!"

"She said to me once," remarked the second-best one, "*'I always fretted for children, but perhaps they were wisely withheld.'*"

"I should think so," consented Lady Cranberry. "When there is a chance of an infant's coming into the world with three chins and a nose like Punch, to say nothing of bandy legs and patent shoes like bicycle gear cases——"

The second-best reminded Lady Cranberry that children were not usually born with shoes.

"Of course, I meant feet," said Lady Cranberry. "Feet of that size and flatness, too. And if there is the merest chance of a child's coming into the world thus handicapped, it is infinitely better that the child should keep out of it. Here we are at Lotta's door. Isn't that cream enamel with the old Florentine copper-embossed knocker and bells too divine for anything? Great Heavens!"

She had evidently received a shock, for she was paler than her powder, and as she clutched her companion's arm her eyes were fixed in quite a ghastly stare.

"Mercy!" the next best-beloved friend of the owner of the cream-white door with the Florentine copper work adjuncts exclaimed, "you saw something—what?"

But Lady Cranberry, with more energy than her weak state seemed to warrant, had ascended Mrs. Lovelace-Legge's brown doorsteps, and was plying the Florentine knocker. The servant who responded to the summons thought that Mrs. Lovelace-Legge was at home, but knew her to be profoundly engaged.

"Take up the names. We will wait," said Lady Cranberry. Then, as the respectful servant went upstairs, she drew her companion into the shelter of a little reposeful niche, in Liberty draperies and Indian carved wood,

where palms and things flourished in pots, and an object of familiar shape, in bamboo work, and newly freed from swathings of brown paper, stood upon a table. To this she pointed with a neatly gloved forefinger that trembled with emotion.

"Oh! Why," cried the other, "it is A BABY'S CRADLE!"

"It was delivered," said Lady Cranberry, "at this door as we came up. It cannot be for a doll: it is full-sized. What on earth can Lotta want with such a thing?"

As she uttered these words the servant returned. His mistress begged the ladies to come upstairs. He delivered his message, and then, with well-trained gravity, lifted the compromising cradle and led the way upstairs. Mrs. Lovelace-Legge did not purpose to receive her friends in the drawing-room, it appeared, or even on the floor above, where her bedroom and boudoir were situated. The ladies were conducted by their guide to regions more airy still; indeed, their progress knew no pause until they reached the highest landing. Here Lady Cranberry received another shock, for a gaily-painted wooden gate, newly hung, gave access to a space where a rocking-horse stood rampant in all the glory of bright paint and red leather trappings; and beyond, through an open door, shone a glimpse of an infantile Paradise, all rosebud dimity, blue ribbons, and brightness, in the midst of which moved Mrs. Lovelace-Legge radiant in a lawn apron with Valenciennes insertion, issuing directions to a head nurse of matronly proportions, an under-nurse of less discretionary years, and a young person dressed in blue baize, trimmed with red braid and buttons, whose functions were less determinable.

"My dears!" Mrs. Lovelace-Legge fluttered to her friends and kissed them, and nothing save Lady Cran-

berry's imperative need of an explanation kept that lady from swooning on the spot. "You find me all anyhow," said Lotta, with beaming eyes. "But come—come and look!" She pioneered the way into the room beyond, with its Lilliputian fittings, its suggestive cosiness, its scent of violet powder and new flannel. "Do you think he will be happy here?" she asked, with a tender quasi-maternal quaver of delightful anticipation.

"Who is—He?"

Lady Cranberry hardly recognized her own voice, so transformed was it by the emotions she suppressed; but Mrs. Lovelace-Legge noticed nothing. "Who?" she echoed, and then laughed with moist, beaming eyes. "Who but the baby? Is it possible I haven't told you? Or Lucy?" The second-best-beloved shook her head. "No. You see—the news of his coming was broken so suddenly that I was carried off my feet, and since then I've done nothing but engage nurses and buy baby things. This is Mrs. Porter"—she turned to the matronly person—"who will have entire charge of my pet—when he arrives; and this is Susan, her assistant. This"—she indicated the anomaly in blue baize and red braid—"is Miss Pilsener, from the Brompton Kindergarten. She is going to teach me how to open his little—*little* mind, and be everything to him from the very beginning!"

"Won't you open *our* little minds?" implored the second-best friend. "You know we are in a state of the darkest ignorance."

Mrs. Lovelace-Legge dismissed her attendants, and made her friends sit down on the nursery sofa, and sank into a low nursing-chair. She absently tried on an india-rubber apron as she spoke, and it was plain her heart was with the invisible infant. "Ask me questions," she

said. "I don't seem able to keep my thoughts concentrated on anything but—baby!"

"You must understand, Lotta," said Lady Cranberry, "that to find you in possession of"—she gulped—"a baby is a shock in itself to your most intimate friends. And in the name of your regard for Lucy, supposing myself to have no claim upon your confidence, I must ask you to explain how you come to be in possession of such a—such a thing? And to—to whom it belongs—and where it is coming from?"

"I came into possession of baby through a dear friend," explained Mrs. Lovelace-Legge. She added: "Perhaps you have heard of General Carabyne—Lieutenant-General Ranford Carabyne of the Ordnance Department, Calcutta?"

Her friends replied simultaneously: "Never!"

"He is the father of my child," continued Mrs. Lovelace-Legge, "and, I am given to understand, a charming person!"

Lady Cranberry's lips moved soundlessly. She might have been breathing a prayer for patience.

"The General," went on Lotta, "married my old school-fellow, Julia Daubeney, in the spring of last year. He had already been married—in fact, had been twice a widower—when Julia met him at a Garrison Gymkhana. It was a case of love at first sight, and I gave Julia her trousseau as my wedding present. And now she is sending me home the General's baby—the child of his last wife—as it cannot stand the climate, and she knows how I dote on little children."

"How old is this child?" queried Lady Cranberry.

Mrs. Lovelace-Legge produced a thin crackling envelope from her pocket, and unfolded Mrs. Carabyne's

letter. "Julia always writes without punctuation, and all her capitals are in the wrong places," she said, apologizing for the hesitation with which she attacked the scrawled pages. "*'I forgot to mention,'*" wrote Julia, "*'that the General has one son quite a darling and a favorite with everybody. He was christened Dampierre. There is French blood on the mother's side, but everybody calls him 'Dumps.' He has the sweetest nature and splendid teeth until about six months old——'*"

"Incoherent, isn't she, rather?" hinted Lady Cranberry.

"*'Six months old when he was thrown out of his bamboo-cart'—Anglo-Indian for perambulator, I suppose—'thrown out of his bamboo-cart with a woman who had got hold of him at the time a most dreadful creature and sustained a severe concussion of the brain. You will gather by this that the poor dear is inclined to be more than a little child,'*"

"Is not the sense of that rather—involved?"

Mrs. Lovelace-Legge held out the letter.

"It is 'child' or else 'wild,'" Lady Cranberry said, dropping her eyeglasses.

"As if an infant of six months old could be called 'wild'!" giggled Mrs. Lovelace-Legge. She read on:

"*'Now the doctors have positively ordered him home, and we have not the least idea where to send him. In this dilemma I thought of you. The General shakes his head, but I have carried my point, and Dumps and his nurse sail by the "Ramjowrah" next Thursday, and when arrived in London will come straight to you. I have every faith in your goodness of heart, and know that poor dear Dumps could be placed in charge of no kinder*

friend. *He is extremely affectionate—from pursuits which ruin many of the most promising young.’*”

“Humph!” ejaculated the puzzled Lady Cranberry.

“Perhaps Julia means tearing his clothes and sucking the paint off his toys?” suggested the second-best dearest friend.

Mrs. Lovelace-Legge read on: “*‘Men in India if you have read Rudyard Kipling I need not be more definite we shall look to your gentle influence to wean him.’*”

“One thing at least is clear,” remarked Lady Cranberry. “The child is not yet weaned. As to your correspondent’s style, Lotta——” She said no more, but in her mind she harbored a most definite conviction that Julia Carabyne drank. “Eau de Cologne or red lavender,” she thought, “or pure, unadulterated cognac. I pity the General from my heart!”

A few more confused and comma-less paragraphs, and the letter wound up.

“You think I did right?” Mrs. Lovelace-Legge glanced round at her preparations. “But, indeed, I had no choice. How could any woman with a heart—and a nursery——”

“Both unoccupied?” said Lady Cranberry.

“Close her doors against a little sick baby, coming all the way from India in a nurse’s arms? The bare idea strikes one as horrible! Besides, the poor darling may arrive at any moment!” Mrs. Lovelace-Legge dried her pretty eyes with a fragment of gossamer cambric, and then—rat-tatter, tatter, TAT! went the hall-door knocker.

The three ladies started to their feet. Mrs. Lovelace-Legge rushed to the window.

“Can it be?”

“The baby—arrived?” . . .

“It has! I see the top of a cab piled with luggage!”

cried Mrs. Lovelace-Legge, leaning eagerly from the nursery window. "I can make out the Harries Line label on the portmanteaux——"

The second-best friend joined her at the casement.

"One thing puzzles me," she said, peering downward. "Would a child of that age travel with gun-cases and a bicycle?"

"They may belong to a passenger friend who promised to see the dear child delivered safely into my hands. Ah, here is Simmons!"

Simmons it was, with a salver and a card. He wore a peculiar, rather wild expression, and his countenance was flushed and somewhat swollen; perhaps with the effort of climbing so many stairs. All three ladies hurried to meet him.

"He—it—the——"

"*They* have arrived?" gasped little Mrs. Lovelace-Legge.

Simmons bowed his head. His mistress could not speak. She took the card without looking at it, and turned away.

"Show them up here!" commanded Lady Cranberry, sympathetically comprehending Lotta's emotion.

"And pay the cabman," added the second-best friend.

Left together, the three women broke out into anticipatory ejaculations:

"The pet!"

"The wumpsy!"

"Will it be pretty?"

"Oh, I hope so! But even if it is not," cried little Mrs. Lovelace-Legge, clasping her hands, "I feel that I shall love it. Ought we"—her eyebrows crumpled inquiringly

—"ought we to give it a warm bath at once? Where is Nurse?"

Nurse and her understrapper appeared on the scene with the young lady from the Kindergarten. Six eager feminine heads were projected over the balusters of the top landing as masculine footsteps creaked upon the staircase, and a tall young man, dressed in a rough yachting suit of blue serge, raised his eyes—a handsome and ingenuous pair—and blushed under the salvo of optical artillery which greeted his appearance. Behind him followed a grizzled, middle-aged person, evidently a soldier-servant in mufti.

"I—I presume . . .," the young gentleman began, "I—I have the honor . . ."

"I am Mrs. Lovelace-Legge," cried the charming widow, craning forward, "and where—oh, where is the baby?"

The young man turned pale. "The—the baby?"

"Haven't you brought it?" cried all the ladies.

Tears welled up in Mrs. Lovelace-Legge's lovely eyes.

"Don't tell me it is dead!" she gasped. "Oh, if that were true, how could I break the news to Julia and General Carabyne?"

"Madam," stammered the young gentleman, "I am the only son of General Carabyne—Dampierre Carabyne." He blushed again. "People usually call me 'Dumps,'" he said, and broke off as all six women screamed at once:

"YOU! YOU THE BABY!"

And the nurses flung their clean cambric aprons over their heads, and rushed in titters from the scene, as poor little Mrs. Lovelace-Legge went into screaming hysterics in the arms of her second-dearest friend.

"It is all a ridi—a ridiculous misunderstanding!" gasped Lady Cranberry, an hour later, as the recovered hostess, her friends, and her newly-arrived guest sat together in the drawing-room. "Let him see Mrs. Carabyne's letter, Lotta. Perhaps he will be able to—— No! Better give it to me." She mounted her gold eyeglasses upon her aquiline nose, and conned the Runic scroll a while. "We were misled," she explained to the young man, "principally by a reference to your nurse."

"Molloy is my nurse," explained Mr. Dampierre Carabyne. "He was one of the hospital orderlies at Calcutta, and looked after me when I was ill. And the Pater thought it best that he should valet me on the voyage, being a useful, experienced kind of man."

"As to this illness you speak of?" said Lady Cranberry.

"It happened six months ago. . . ."

"Ago! I see a glimmer," said Lady Cranberry.

"When I was thrown out of a bamboo-cart in which I was driving a friend of mine—a very great friend."

Again the young man colored.

"*The woman who had got hold of him,*" murmured Lady Cranberry to herself. "And '*more than a little child*' means '*more than a little wild*.' I should have seen *that* in his eye without a hint from Mrs. Carabyne."

Thus, bit by bit, the determined lady translated Julia's letter, which ran as follows:

"He was christened Dampierre (there is French blood on the mother's side); but everybody calls him 'Dumps.' He has the sweetest nature, and splendid health until six months ago, when he was thrown out of his bamboo-cart with a woman who had got hold of him at the time—a most dreadful creature—and sustained a severe concus-

sion of the brain. (You will gather by this that the poor dear is inclined to be more than a little wild.) Now the doctors have positively ordered him home, and we have not the least idea where to send him. In this dilemma I thought of you. The General shakes his head, but I have carried my point, and Dumps and his nurse sail by the *Ramjowrah* next Thursday, and when arrived in London will come straight to you. I have every faith in your goodness of heart, and know that poor dear Dumps could be placed in charge of no kinder friend. . . . He is extremely affectionate. . . . From pursuits which ruin many of the most promising young men in India (if you have read Rudyard Kipling I need not be more definite) we look to your gentle influence to wean him."

Lady Cranberry took off her *pince-nez* and refolded the letter. As she did so she glanced toward the snug nook by the fireplace, where the pretty widow, entrenched behind the barricade of her afternoon tea-table, was making but a feeble show of resistance to the raking fire of Dumps's handsome eyes. In such a mood such a woman as Lady Cranberry shares a corner of the mantle of the Prophets. It occurred to her that the infantile Paradise upstairs might not, if all went merrily as marriage bells, remain so very long untenanted.

And, indeed, at the expiration of a twelvemonth from that date Mrs. Dampierre Carabyne——

Please see the left-hand top corner reserved in the morning papers for these delicate and personal intimations.

YVONNE

IN TWO PARTS

I

A MILE or so north of the fishy little Breton harbor town of Paimpol, the hamlet of Pors Lanec is represented by a scattered cluster of low-pitched, straggling cottages built of gray granite boulders splashed with yellow lichen, their thatch of furze and reeds or broom-bush secured by lashings of rope, and heavy flagstones from the fierce assaults of the western gales. One in especial stands on an incline trending toward the beach, below the level of the Paimpol road. Its rear wall is formed by a low cliff against which it has been built, and which, rearing some twenty feet above the level of its shaggy brown roof, and throwing out a natural buttress toward the sea, protects the poor dwelling from the icy northern winds. Three uneven steps, worn by the feet of generations of fisher-dwellers, lead to the door, whose inner latch is lifted by a length of rope-yarn, reeved through a hole. On each side of the door a window has been hollowed out in the solid masonry of the wall, and roughly glazed; and beneath the rude slate ledge of each is a weather-beaten bench of drift-oak, blackened by age and usage. The door standing open gives a glimpse of the usual Breton interior, bunches of

dried herbs, nets, and baskets depending from the blackened rafters, carved sleeping-bunks set about the walls, a few quaint pewter and copper flagons hanging on pegs driven into the chimney, and reflecting the leaping blaze of the pine and beechwood branches burning on the hearth.

I do not know who lives in Mademoiselle Yvonne's cottage now, but a year ago the western gale was churning the gray sea into futile anger, and thrashing the stunted bushes into a more bending shape. The sky was somber as the sea, with eastward-hurrying drifts of slaty cirrus, which separated to reveal pale, sun-washed sky-spaces, and closed again, making the gloom seem deeper than before.

It was the eighth of December, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception—the day of the Pardon des Islandais—and the morning Angelus was ringing from the storm-beaten little chapel on the heights above, where nosegays of artificial flowers and strings of shells adorned the image of Our Lady of Good Help, and white-capped women, and rugged-faced, long-haired men knelt, rapt and serious, on the sandy stone pavement. Others were hurrying into Paimpol, where the streets were decorated with white sheets bordered with holly and ivy leaves in readiness for the procession. And a fine, icy rain was driving before the wind, and Yvonne's tables and chairs stood out of doors while their owner beat and scrubbed them vigorously with a birch-broom dipped in soap-suds.

"She works upon the *fête* day, yes; but for all that she is no heretic, the poor Yvonne," a passer-by explained to a companion—a stranger who showed surprise at the unusual spectacle. "All days are alike to her—and Our Lady understands."

The speaker, a brown-faced, vigorous woman of fifty, paused on the pathway, littered with brown trails of slippery seaweed, and cried:

"Hey! So you're not going with us to Paimpol, Mademoiselle Yvonne?"

Mademoiselle Yvonne ceased flogging her table, and turned her face toward the questioner. It was a full, straight-featured, rather massive face, framed in the shell-fluted cap worn by unmarried women. The brows were broad, and from under the straight eyebrows looked a pair of eyes that were blue and clear and candid as those of the little boy who clung to the skirts of the woman who addressed her. As she drew herself up, resting on her birch broom, it might be seen that she was tall and deep-chested and broad-bosomed, and that the massive plaits of hair coiled upon her temples were gray.

"Going to Paimpol! Sure, it is impossible," said Mademoiselle Yvonne. "There is so much to do getting the house ready." A rich deep color flushed her cheeks, staining her temples and tinting her full throat to the edge of her bodice. "When one is to be married, Madame understands——"

"So then! You have heard?" cried the neighbor with an elaborate pantomime of delight at the good news. "You have had a letter from Iceland at last?"

The clear blue eyes looked troubled for a moment.

"No. Not that," said Mademoiselle Yvonne. "Not precisely a letter, but I have made out why the *Marie au Secours* delays so long. You see, they must have had a great catch at the cod-fisheries, and, being a man of brains, my Yann set out to make the most of his good luck. So the *Marie au Secours* will have merely touched at Paimpol, and then sailed down to the Gulf of Gascony,

where fish fetch high prices, or even to the Sandy Isles." One of her massive plaits, released by her vigorous movements from the confining pin, uncoiled and fell below her waist. "That is how it will have been, Madame Pilot!" exclaimed Yvonne, smiling and coiling up the beautiful hair.

"Without doubt, that is how it will have been!" assented the other.

She drove her stout elbow into the ribs of the woman who had whispered to her. "Not so loud!" We people of the coast have sharper ears than you folks from inland."

"When did he sail?"

"Twenty years ago, when she was eighteen, and all that gray hair gold."

"Pfui! There was a blast!"

"We shall have to pick the wind's bones all the way to Paimpol. So good-day, Mademoiselle. . . . Gaos, run and bid Mademoiselle Yvonne good-day."

Madame Pilot nudged the other woman again, as much as to say: "Watch her with the child!"

Gaos obediently quitted his mother's skirts, and Yvonne knelt down to kiss him. She whispered in the child's ear coaxingly, and, as he hesitated, watched the innocent lips as though her fate in some inexplicable way hung upon their utterance.

"She always tries to get him to say it, and he never will!" said Madame Pilot under her breath.

"What?" mouthed the inland woman, with round, interested eyes.

The child spoke at that moment loudly and clearly.

"He will come back to-day!"

"Lord above! if he hasn't said it!" cried Madame

Pilot, and crossed herself under her ample cloak as the boy came running to her.

She caught his hand, and clattered on in her heavy wooden shoes, fighting her way resolutely against the wind, followed more slowly by the gaping inlander.

"You rogue! You little villain!" she cried to the child she dragged. "What made you say it?"

"Be-be-cause—bub—bub—boo—because it's true!" roared Gaos, through angry sobs.

His mother, with a hasty invocation of her patron saint, dropped his hand, stopped where the beach-pathway merged in the Paimpol road, and looked back. Mademoiselle Yvonne was nowhere to be seen at first, but presently her figure mounted into view climbing the pathway to the chapel.

"She has gone to burn a candle for her good news," said Madame Pilot. "Now which have I for a son . . . a liar or a prophet? If one were to mistake and smack the prophet, it's enough to bring a judgment down. . . ." She shook her head mournfully. "But it is to be prayed for, all the same, that that great rogue Yann may never come wheedling back. Drowned, did you suppose? Dead? Not a bit of it! . . . He's living on the fat of the land in Ploubazou, where he landed his last cargo of fish nineteen years ago, married a tavern-keeper's daughter, and set up a sailor's drinking-house himself; 'The Chinese Cider Cellars,' they call it. May Heaven punish such vagabonds!" panted Madame Pilot. "As for us in Pors Lanec, we're peace-lovers and law-abiders, but there are stones and cudgels waiting for Monsieur Yann Tregnier whenever he shows his nose here."

Madame Pilot stopped, as a broad-shouldered young man in a sailor's cap and pilot-cloth jacket came tramp-

ing toward her along the puddly Paimpol road, whistling a cheerful tune. He wore thick town-made brogues instead of wooden *sabots*, and saluted the women in the country fashion, though to him personally they were unknown, and passed by, leaving the mother of the possible prophet staring; for he was known to her as the son of the Ploubazou tavern-keeper Yann Tregnier, christened Jean-Marie after his mother's father. He was a well-looking, sturdy young fellow of eighteen, who had always hankered to join the Icelanders, as the cod-trawlers are called, and sail with the yearly fleet on the last day of February for the big, dangerous fisheries in the icy regions where the summers have no night. But Yann, his father, would not hear of it, and Jean-Marie had been apprenticed to a cooper in Paimpol. He had grumbled, but his fate appeared less hard now that he was in love with Gaud. Gaud lived with an aunt in the village of Pors Lanec, a place Jean-Marie knew as yet only by hearsay, since her parents lived in Paimpol, and she had met her lover while upon a visit to them. Pors Lanec lay by the beach a mile or two from Paimpol, Gaud had told him. The cottage was built against a great rock, the doorstep was the beach, and the sea the duck-pond before the door; he could not fail to recognize the place, Gaud had described it so clearly.

Gaud was a little delicate creature, with hair of burning gold hidden under her shell cap, and great violet-gray eyes, full of possible adoration for any likely young fellow who should come wooing to Pors Lanec, and the likely young fellow had come along in the person of Jean-Marie. And he had won her promise, and meant to marry her and settle down to the cooper's trade in earnest. True, the girl was without a dower, and his

father, with whom he had had a talk at Ploubazou last Sunday, had pulled a long lip at that piece of information, and he had said to the old man straight out: "Either I get Gaud or go to sea!"

"Either I get Gaud—or go to sea!" Jean-Marie repeated now in the most deep and manly voice he had at command. For the cottage built against the cliff had come in sight, a dwelling so weather-worn and lichen-stained that it might have been an excrescence upon the side of the rock that sheltered it. "Either I get Gaud . . ." Jean-Marie squared his shoulders, and marched down upon the cottage where Gaud lived. As his firm footsteps crossed the plateau of sandy rock that lay before the cottage door he heard a cry from within, and before he could lift a hand to the rope-yarn of the latch, the door was pulled violently back, thrown open, and a woman fell upon his breast with a sobbing shriek of joy.

"Yann! Oh, my beloved, at last!"

"Madame!" he stuttered.

"Our Lady sent me word you would return to-day, and even as I was upon my way to thank her for such grace, I turned back thinking. 'If he should come and miss me!'"

The wind blew shrilly; the sky grew black with storm. Jean-Marie's cheek was wet with rain or the woman's tears. He was conscious of a dizziness. It was as though a web of some strange tissue were weaving in the chambers of his brain, and the pattern grew more and more familiar. The arms that clasped him were not those of a stranger; the heart that throbbed upon his own had rested there before. Even the cottage interior shown through the low doorway was familiar, and the oaken

benches to right and left, had he not carved his name on one of them, his and another's?

But even as these strange questions awakened in the mind of the young man, he was thrust violently back, and Yvonne was gazing, with still streaming eyes, at the face of a stranger, while, partly hidden by the tall figure of her aunt, appeared the little shrinking figure of Mademoiselle Gaud!

"Who is it?" asked Yvonne dully, without removing her eyes from that unknown face of the man whose step was like Yann's.

"I—I believe—I think—'tis Monsieur Jean-Marie," panted Gaud. "Sweet St. Agnes!" she prayed inwardly to her patron saint, "make her not ask me his other name! If she does I am sure I shall lie and say I do not know; so, sweetest St. Agnes, preserve me from sinning!" Next moment she breathed freely, for Yvonne stepped aside, leaving the threshold free to the stranger.

"Ask of his business, little one!" she said, without looking at Gaud, "and let him know that he was mistaken for one who has a right to be welcomed with open arms."

She had a black woollen cloak loosely thrown about her shoulders. She sat down upon the seat to the right of the door, her elbow on her knee, her chin upon her hand, the dark folds half concealing the noble outlines of her form, her eyes fixed upon the most distant turn in the Paimpol road.

Jean-Marie was at liberty to proceed with his courting; Yvonne seemed to hear and see him no longer. Only as the lover grew gayer, and the clear laugh of Gaud sounded in unison with his, a quiver passed over the face of Yvonne. At twelve o'clock, when the dinner was

ready, Gaud came dutifully to tell her. She only shook her head, and the midday meal of salt fish, potatoes, and cider was shared by the lovers.

When the dishes were washed, Jean-Marie proposed a stroll to the chapel on the cliff. Gaud, her pale cheeks tipped with a little crimson, like the leaves of a daisy, came to ask Yvonne's permission.

"My mother allowed him to visit us in Paimpol," she said meekly, flushing deeper as she remembered that she had introduced him as Monsieur Jean-Marie, the cooper's apprentice, and that her mother knew nothing of his relationship to the man who had used her Aunt Yvonne so wickedly. Through the crystal of Gaud's nature ran a little streak of deceptiveness. Like all weak things, she could be cunning where her love or her interest was concerned, and what did it matter what Jean-Marie's father had done? she argued. He was not Jean-Marie. So she and her sweetheart set out upon their walk, keeping a decorous distance of at least six feet between them, and swinging unoccupied hands that, when the path grew narrow, would meet and cling. And Yvonne saw two figures appear in the distance upon the Paimpol road, neither of which caused her any emotion. Monsieur Blandon, the Paimpol doctor, was hirpling out upon his old white mare, to visit some of his Pors Lanec patients; half an hour must elapse before he could dismount at Yvonne's door, the mare was so old and the road so stony. She looked away, far out to sea, and watched a tossing white sail upon the inky horizon, and with the instinct of one bred by the sea knew that there would be weather yet more stormy, for the seagulls and kittiwakes were hurrying inland. Then a heavy pair of wooden shoes clacked over the stones, and a vinous voice

gave her "good-day." It was one Piggou Moan, once a smart young fisherman and avowed rival of Yann, now the smuggler, the loafer, the drunkard of the hamlet.

"A drop o' cider, Mademoiselle Yvonne, for old friendship's sake and charity," begged the toper. Yvonne scarcely looked at him, but made a slight motion of her hand toward the cottage door. With a slobbered blessing, red-nosed, ragged Piggou lurched in, lucky in the absence of Gaud, who would have found enough courage, at need, to have driven him forth with a broomstick. He reached a copper flagon from its peg, and went as if by instinct to the cider-cask that stood by the great, carved clothes-press. Minutes passed, and Piggou came out, brighter of eye if redder of nose than when he entered, wiping his dripping beard on his ragged sleeve.

"It's long since you and Piggou had a crack together, Mademoiselle Yvonne—years it is, and years! I'm not as fine a fellow as I used to be, though you're a comely figure of a woman still. Excuse the freedom, Mademoiselle! . . ."

She looked at the drunkard with cold dislike, and moved toward the farther end of the bench as his liquored breath and flaming face came near her.

II

Piggou took the movement of Yvonne toward the end of the bench as an invitation, and sat down, as the doctor, hidden by a bend in the road, hirpled nearer on his old white mare.

"I bear no malice," the toper went on, "though, I take the saints to witness, what I am I owe to you, Mademoi-

selles Yvonne—for being so handsome and so proud, for giving me the back of your hand, and the whole of your heart to Monsieur Yann Tregnier, who went away with it and never came back.”

“He is coming back!” said Yvonne quietly, her eyes upon the most distant turn of the Paimpol road.

Piggou chuckled drunkenly.

“So you’ve said, Mademoiselle, for twenty years, since the *Marie au Secours* sailed for Iceland, Captain Yann aboard her.”

She repeated: “He is coming back to-night!”

Piggou leered drunkenly.

“Come, my old gossip, my handsome Yvonne, don’t play the fool with Daddy Piggou. You’re not so cracked as you pretend to be, d’ye comprehend me? You know this waiting game’s a farce. He, your Yann, won’t come back; not because he’s dead, but because he’s alive. Alive and married to Louet Kergueven, that he had an eye on because of her dad’s money; and they’ve as many children as peas in a pod—the eldest as fine a lad of eighteen as ever trod in his father’s footsteps all the ways to Pors Lanec. Didn’t I see him just now with that little white cat, Mademoiselle Gaud . . .”

The rest was strangled in the drunkard’s throat as upon the white-washed wall behind him fell the stout shadow of Dr. Blandon, and the serviceable horn handle of an old-fashioned hunting-crop wielded by an arm still muscular hooked itself in Piggou’s cravat and plucked him from his seat. He sprawled, spluttering oaths.

“Begone, rascal! and if I ever hear of your trying this again, I’ll poison you next time I catch you in hospital,” foamed the doctor.

"Why shouldn't one tell the truth and shame the devil!" grunted Piggou.

"Would you like me to tell Messieurs les Douaniers at the Paimpol Quay House the truth about those fine cod you were carrying when I met you last month on the road to Ploubazou? Ten whopping fellows, each with a box of prime Habanas in his gullet, and every box wrapped round in Spanish lace? . . . Be off with you!" And, assisted by some additional impetus from the toe of the doctor's riding-boot, Piggou scrambled to his feet and clattered away.

Yvonne had not stirred while this little scene was in action. Her elbow on her knee, her chin upon her hand, she sat and watched that distant bend in the Paimpol road as she had watched it, to quote Madame Pilot, "when all that hair was gold." Now she turned toward the doctor, who was her good friend.

"That is done with," Monsieur Blandon pointed to the ragged figure of the receding Piggou. "He knows what he will get if he troubles you with his rubbish again. And how is the heart, Mademoiselle? Those drops I left last time. . . . You take them?"

"I take them; but," said Yvonne, her quiet eyes upon the road, "they make my heart beat."

"That's what they are for, Mademoiselle."

"They make my heart beat," she said, "until night and day, day and night, the beating seems like the sound of footsteps coming to me along the road. Nearer and nearer—louder and louder. Then they grow hesitating, irregular, and stop. Stop, and then go back. And as they become fainter in the distance, I seem to grow more quiet and more cold."

Said the doctor, possessing himself of Yvonne's wrist

and watching her as he counted the pulse-beats as intently as she watched the road:

"They are footsteps of one you know, Mademoiselle?"

She turned on him those startingly blue and brilliant eyes.

"Surely . . . They are his!"

The doctor had often met a tall man muffled in a great country cape of frieze walking on the Paimpol road. They had never exchanged words, scarcely even looks, but the brass buttons in the back of Blandon's old riding-coat were eyes, and he had observed how the walker turned back before reaching that last bend from which the cottage could be plainly seen.

"His evil conscience keeps him restless—or he loves her still, though he bartered her love for a tavern and a scolding wife," the Doctor thought, noting, without seeming to do so, the changes time had made in the bold, handsome face and giant frame of Captain Yann Tregnier, late of the *Marie au Secours*, now landlord of the Chinese Cider Cellars at Ploubazou. "But to set foot in Pors Lanec he will not dare. The men and women would rise up and stone him out of the village."

And Monsieur Blandon bade Yvonne adieu, and turned up his collar and got upon his shambling old white horse to ride back to Paimpol.

Yvonne sat where he had left her. The early winter evening was closing in. The wind had fallen, and the sea had gone down; only it breathed from time to time like a sleeping monster of the diluvian age. Through the black curtains of the sky some pale stars looked forth, and white spectral clouds, in shapes appalling to the sense, pursued a flying moon. The lovers had not returned, the hearth-fire was dying out. Guessing at this, Yvonne

bestirred herself to go within and feed it with fresh branches. The fading flame wakened again; she turned toward the door, and as she did so the step for which she had waited twenty years crashed over the gravel, sounded on the stone plateau before the cottage, and the figure of a man—massive, almost a giant in height and breadth, his great proportions increased in bulk by a heavy cape of the country frieze—filled up the doorway.

It had come—the moment for which she had waited through the years. She did not scream and fall upon his neck; he made no movement toward her. Only he pulled his rough cap from his head with a deference that had awe in it, and fear, and his heavy black curls, grizzled now, fell over the brow that was lined and rugged, and the eyes that were no longer bright with youth and hope, but bleared with a dull, sordid life and much strong drink, and the hopeless outlook on a life that was bare of all joy.

“Yann! My love . . . Yann! You have come back to me at last!”

The words were not uttered in a cry, but almost whispered. As the light of love and joy kindled in her eyes she became young once more. Her arms swept out to clasp him and found him not, for he had sunk down upon his knees; but he clutched her apron and drew her to him, and broke into hoarse, uncouth weeping, his head hidden against her, his arms clasping her, her love and pity overshadowing him like an angel's wings.

“He weeps for joy!” she thought, whereas he wept for shame; but had she known the truth she would still have comforted him. After a while he grew calmer, and they went out together into a night suddenly become beautiful and glorious with stars—or it seemed so to Yvonne—and

sat together on the bench beneath the window, cheek to cheek and arms entwined, and she poured out her brimming heart to him. How she had waited, she told. Patiently, hoping always, loving him always, never despairing, sure of his return. Had he been dead she would have known it. But in the absence of the warning that never fails to come—the midnight wail beneath the window, the midnight knock upon the door or window-pane, given by no hand of mortal flesh—she had remained quite certain that he was alive. Had she not been right in guessing that the *Marie au Secours* had only touched at Paimpol and sailed down into the Gulf of Gascony, or even to Bayonne, to sell her cargo of salt cod?

"Ay. 'Twas as you thought, Yvonne!" he answered.

"And you sold well?"

"Ay!" he answered again. Truly, he had sold well, more than his fish. Honor and love, both had gone into the scales against the dowry of the tavern-keeper's scolding wife, a houseful of children—a sordid existence flavored with the fumes of stale drink and stale tobacco, a few bags of dirty five-franc pieces stowed away in a safe hiding-place, for the Breton is a hoarder by instinct, and distrusts the Bank of France: for these rags and fardels he had bartered Yvonne. He was dully conscious of such thoughts as these even as he was conscious of the joy of being near her. Coarse-fibered as he was, this, the one pure passion of his life, revived in all its old strength at the clasp of Yvonne's hands and the meeting of their eyes. He began to believe that the desire to be near her once more again had brought him to Pors Lanec. Perhaps he was right, but the motive, he had admitted to himself, was mean and sordid. He wished

to bring about a rupture between Jean-Marie and Gaud. The girl was penniless; Jean-Marie a love-sick young fool. Besides, his wife would never consent to a union of their families; she had never ceased to be jealous of the sweetheart to whom Yann had played false. "You threw her over for my money, rogue that you are!" she would say to him, when red wine dashed with cider had made her quarrelsome.

The night drew on. Drifting clouds no longer obscured the faces of the stars; the December night might, for mildness, have been May, or so it seemed to Yann and to Yvonne. There was a fragrance in the air like hawthorn, and the shrill chirping of a cricket rose from the glowing hearth in the darkened room behind them.

The lovers found few words to utter, but their silence was eloquent; the air they breathed in unison seemed the revivifying essence of joyous life. Yann yielded to the exquisite intoxication. In the glamour of that meeting he was young again, clean of heart and soul, looking forward to their wedding day with the eagerness of a true lover. He found himself replying in low, eager tones to Yvonne's questions. . . . No, he would not sail for Iceland in February as a bachelor; they must get married before the Blessing of the Boats. The official papers must be filled and signed, the banns put up . . . there would be a honeymoon for Yann and Yvonne before the *Marie au Secours* (poor old vessel, long ago cast up in driftwood on the shores of Iceland) should set sail.

"Ay, indeed, my love, we have waited long enough!" he said.

Yvonne laughed, a low melodious laugh of happiness, and owned that the wedding dress, handsomely made and trimmed with broad bands of velvet, just as he liked best

—had been ready a long time. She took him back to her pure heart, without a word, without a question. . . . He had been long in coming, but he had come at last, and she was utterly content. He drew her into his strong embrace, and she laid her head on his great shoulder with the sigh of a child that is weary with too much bliss. His arm encircled her; both her hands, clasped together, rested in his large palm. Sleep came to her, and peace; even the breath that at first had fluttered fitfully beneath his cheek could be felt no more. And the night wore on apace, and the glamour fell from him, little by little, and he was again the landlord of the Chinese Cider Cellars, with a scolding wife, and an obstinate whelp of a son, mad to marry a penniless little draggle-tail. Ay, he could speak now, and he would! He unwound his arm from the waist of Yvonne and withdrew the support of his rough palm from her clasped hands, and as he did so a long faint sigh escaped her and her head fell back against the whitewashed wall. Ay, he could speak, and did!

“Lord knows what nonsense we have been talking, you and me. . . . Something bewitched me. . . . The fine night or the sight of the old place. In truth, Yvonne, you know as well as I do that I’m a married man; that cat must ha’ got out of the bag long ago. And hearing that you never would believe I’d played fast and loose with ye made me a bit shamefaced, hence we never have clapped eyes on one another until now, Yvonne. Though my young cub has been hanging about here after the girl Gaud—threatening me with going to sea if she’s denied him—and seeing as she hasn’t a sou of dowry, I look to you to stop that foolery. For my good woman at home.

. . . I'll own her a bit of a Tartar, and, to tell ye the truth, Yvonne——”

“Father!” said Jean-Marie, stepping forward out of the darkness, the dimly-seen, shrinking figure of Gaud behind him.

Yann rose up, threatening and formidable, his clenched fist ready to strike. Gaud cried out in fear; but Yvonne, the silvery moonlight filling the hollows of her quiet eyes and resting in the curves of her white cheeks, and kissing her closed, patient lips into the semblance of a smile, never stirred. The night wind played with a little lock of hair escaping from the edge of her shell-fluted cap, and her bosom neither rose nor fell.

“Pretty goings on. . . . Look here, you cub!” Yann was beginning, but his son's eyes looked past his at the placid face of the sleeper on the bench, and the fear and awe in them were not inspired by his father. Yann looked round then, and a hoarse cry broke from him.

“Speak to her,” whispered Jean-Marie, and Gaud tremblingly touched Yvonne's clasped hands. They were cold as the smiling lips and the sealed eyes on which rested the white peace that is the kiss of Death.

The cricket chirped within the cottage, and the deep slumbrous breathing of the sea came from beyond a curtain of chill white mist. Yvonne's long time of waiting had ended at last.

THE DELUSION OF MRS. DONOHUE

IN TWO PARTS

I

IT was in the spring of 19— that the Dapple Grays returned from South Africa, covered with wounds, glory, boils, and khaki, this last presenting many solutions of continuity. One finds the arrival of H. M. troopship *Paradise* at Porthampton Dockyard referred to in the newspapers bearing the date of that occurrence as an event calculated to awaken emotions of gratitude and enthusiasm in the bosom of every Briton. An illuminated address was presented to the Chief by the Mayor and Corporation of the borough, and the Dapple Grays were subsequently entertained, the Colonel and officers to a banquet, and the rank and file to a blow-out.

“You return to us, Captain,” the Mayor is reported to have said in a complimentary rider addressed to the commanding officer of the *Paradise*, “with a freight of heroes.”

“A freight of devils, sir!” the Captain remarked in loud-toned confidence to the neighbor on his left. “If the Admiralty had any sense of humor—or any sense of fitness, by George!—the name of the ship would have been changed before we sailed. But the *Paradise* has

seemed almost like one, sir, since we disembarked 'em, and that's a fact. What's the next toast on the list, did you ask? 'The united healths of the two regimental V. C.'s, Captain the Hon. Gerald Garthside and Private Dancey Juxon.' "

"What were the special acts of gallantry, do you—ah!—happen to—ah!—remember?" asked the Captain's left-hand neighbor (a pompous local magnate), "for which the Cross has been—ah!—conferred?"

"Usual thing. Garthside—that's Garthside, on the Mayor's left hand, trying to look modest, and succeedin' uncommon badly—Garthside rode from Mealiekloof to Blitzfontein with despatches for the Brigadier, peppered by Cronje's outposts from overlooking ground nearly the whole distance. Juxon was cut off while out on scout with a detachment, and got away from twenty Boers with his officer on the crupper. Young Bogle, next-of-kin to Lord Baverstone, died before Juxon got back to the regiment, chipped in too many places for recovery! Better off if he'd been left behind, do you say? Probably—probably. But Juxon has the V. C., and they're bringin' him in to hear his health proposed. . . . Fine-lookin' young Tommy, isn't he? Looks quiet and well-behaved, you think? Ah, you ought to have been with us on the voyage from the Cape. The evil genius of the lower troop-deck, and that's facts. Ringleader in every act of insubordination, up to all sorts of devilment, a black sheep, sir, a black—hip, hip, hurray! For he's a jolly——"

"And so," said the Colonel of the Dapple Grays to his Senior Major, a few weeks later, when the regiment had shaken down in its old barracks at Studminster; when its feminine complement had rejoined it; when wives once

more "upon the strength" were washing the tattered remains of shirts which had seen more service than soap-suds, and husbands were employing eloquence in the effort to convince civilian visitors to the canteen that, despite the solemn warning recently issued from the most authoritative quarters, to treat the newly-convalescent enteric patient to beer or ardent spirits is to accelerate and not to retard his return to perfect health—— "And so it's a settled thing, the engagement between your little girl and Garthside? Affair not jumped up in a hurry? Began a year before the regiment was ordered to the Front? Of course. My wife saw the attachment growing between 'em, and helped it on, she tells me. Every married woman's a match-maker, you know—don't you know—whether she's put her own private pot on a bit of good blood, with temper and stayin' power and so forth, or a dee-d confounded showy screw. And your little girl, not having a level-headed mother of her own alive to look after her! . . . Deucedly raw weather, you know, don't you know!"

Sir Alured broke off, anticipating rather than seeing the gray change in Major Rufford's face, and remembering that the handsome wife, who had died when Emmie was a hoyden of thirteen, had signalized the close of her career upon earth as Major Rufford's wife and the mother of his children by an act of desperate folly. But the Senior Major's wounds had been cicatrized by the great healer Time, and he looked back quietly enough as the Colonel cleared his throat with unnecessary violence, and twisted the great moustache that had been iron-gray and was now snow-white.

"Lady Gassiloe has been very kind, and Emmie doesn't forget how much she owes her. And there's the right

stuff in Garthside; I can trust him to make my little girl a good husband. It's odd, when one comes to think of it, that our other Victoria Cross man is going to be married, and to Emmie's foster-sister, Peggy Donohoe."

"The deuce!" said Sir Alured. "Is that dee-d young scoundrel, Juxon, going to settle down? Seems too good to be true. Why, the old *Paradise* was hell when Juxon wasn't in the cells. Nearest approach to a rhyme I ever made in my life, by George! But Juxon's character apart it's not a bad match. The young blackguard has plenty of good looks, and Peggy's as pretty a girl as you may see, look high or low. And she thinks Juxon a *proo shevally* with his V. C.; and so do poor Bogle's people, and so do the public, by Jove! You should have heard him when he reported himself. . . . '*What did you mean, you dee-d idiot,*' I asked him, '*by picking up a man who'd had the top of his head shot clean off, and couldn't live five minutes? D'ye call that philanthropy? In my opinion it's dee-d foolery!*' 'Beggin' your pardon, Colonel, sir!' says Juxon, 'I calls it precaution. When I 'oisted Mr. Bogle up be'ind me, I see'd 'e'd 'ad 'is gruel, an' the last breath went out of 'im before old 'Andsome-Is—that's wot I calls that 'ere spavined gray o' mine—'ad got into 'is stride. But the bullets was 'ummin' round me like 'ornets, an' pore Mr. Bogle, lyin' as 'e wos acrost my 'ams, drawed fire an' furnished cover.' Furnished cover! The cool young beggar fortifies his rear with the next in succession to one of the oldest peerages in the United Kingdom, gets mentioned in despatches, and receives his V. C.! Too dee-d funny, you know, don't you know!"

And Sir Alured mixed a brandy and soda, and chose an enormous cigar from a case resembling a young Glad-

stone bag. The conversation took place in a curious ground-glass hutch, sacred to the inner mysteries of Official business, and labeled "Private." And as the second in command charged and kindled a meerschaum of incredible age and foulness, there came a knock at the door.

"C'min!" barked the Chief over the rim of the tilted tumbler, and the regimental Doctor looked round the door. "Oh! it's you, Assassin!" he said, as he wiped the froth off the great white moustache. "How many enterics have you kicked out of the convalescent ward this morning?"

"Three," said the Assassin—"Denver, Moriarty, and Jarman. Garthside's lambs all."

"And dee-d malingerers, in my opinion!" said Sir Alured.

"I'm with you there, sir," responded the Assassin with a twinkle. Then he relapsed into professional gravity, and said as he accepted a cigar and a peg, "There are one or two bad cases of relapse, I'm sorry to say—as the result of incautious indulgence in alcoholic beverages."

"Of course, of course!" growled Sir Alured. "When a man with a granulated stomach uses the organ as a receptacle for whisky, beer, and gin, contributed in unlimited quantities by admirin' friends, he oughtn't to be surprised when he finds himself drivin' to the cemetery on a gun carriage to the tune of the Dead March in *Saul*, with his boots following as chief mourners. Stands to reason!"

"I don't anticipate any serious results, except in the case of Sergeant Donohoe," the Assassin said, with a worried look in his usually cheerful countenance.

"Donohoe down again. Poor devil! I'm sorry to hear

it!" The Chief tugged at the ends of the great white moustache and looked grave.

"Only yesterday," said the Senior Major, "I thought him looking about as fit as a man needs to be. He told me about Juxon's engagement to his daughter, and went off as pleased as Punch——"

"To drink their healths," interpolated the Assassin.

"Hah! That's about it," grumbled the Chief. "Well, I shall go round and look Donohoe up presently. Can't afford to lose my Senior Color-Sergeant, you know, don't you know!" Sir Alured frowned savagely, and cleared his throat with ominous vigor.

"You'll find him pretty low down," said the Assassin, "and I fancy Father Haggarty will be on duty. They'd sent for him before I came away."

"Is it as bad as that?" said the Senior Major, and there was a moment's silence, broken by a clinking step on the stone flags outside and a respectful knock on the glass door.

"A 'ospital horderly, sir," said the passage orderly to Major Rufford, "with Color-Sergeant Donohoe's respectful duty, and would you mind the trouble of steppin' over and hearin' somethin', sir, wot 'e 'as to say? It's Ward C., and a case of perforation—and, beggin' your pardon, sir, there ain't much time to lose."

"Of course I'll come! Say, at once!" Major Rufford lumbered up out of his chair, emptied the office kitten out of his undress cap, took his cane, which the office puppy had been chewing, and went.

"Donohoe's wife was Rufford's girl's foster-mother, you know, don't you know!" said Sir Alured. "There's not more than a month's difference between Peggy Donohoe and Emmie Rufford in age. When they were babies I've

seen 'em sleepin' in the same cradle; and dee me if I knew which of 'em was which, though I suppose their mothers did. Not that Rufford's poor wife was over and above devoted to her babies. Odd now if the little beggars had got mixed up somehow, and Donohoe had sent for Rufford with the object of easin' his conscience before he gave up the number of his mess."

"Oh, that's all Gilbert and Sullivan!" said the Assassin, getting up. "Such things don't happen in real life, Colonel, and I'm going back to the hospital."

"You think not? Differ with you there. Walk over with you, if you've no objection." And the Chief and the Assassin followed in the wake of Major Rufford, who had only a moment before received point-blank and at short range from Sergeant Donohoe's puffy blue lips—parted for easier passage of the slow, painful breaths that were taken with such agony—the second overwhelming surprise of his life.

For Sir Alured's stray shot had registered a bull's-eye. Donohoe, conscious that the grim messenger who had beckoned and passed by so many times—under the heights of Jagai, in the clammy Burmese hill jungles, amid the muddy swamps of West Africa, or the karroo scrub or grass veldt of the South—meant business on this occasion—had given up the secret less hidden than forgotten for many years. Many years since, according to her own confession, faltered out to the Sergeant upon her dying bed, the pretty young wife of Private Donohoe, urged by the promptings of motherly love, or incited, as Father Haggarty would have said, by the temptation of the Devil, arrayed her own nursling in the long-tailed cambric robe with insertion of Valenciennes, properly appertaining to the foster-babe; enduing the

said foster-babe, namely Emmeline, infant daughter of Captain and Mrs. Rufford, not only with the abbreviated cotton frock which was the birthright of a Donohoe, but with all the privileges appertaining to a daughter of the rank and file; including a share in the Christmas tree and bran-pie diversions annually given under the patronage of the Colonel's wife and other ladies of the Regiment—including her own mother.

"Don't say it, Donohoe," pleaded the bewildered Major, sitting on the foot of Donohoe's cot-bed, holding the rigid hand, and shaken by the throes that were rending the Sergeant's soul from the Sergeant's body. "It's an idea you've got into your head—nothing more! She—your wife—never changed the babies. . . . For God's sake, man, say you know she didn't!"

But Father Haggarty's kindly, pitying look had in it knowledge, religiously kept sacred, now freed by voluntary confession from the sacramental seal. He held the Crucifix to Donohoe's livid lips, and they moved, and a living voice came forth as from a sepulchre:

"She did ut. Sure enough she did ut; but for the right rayson why, sorr, I'm yet asthray. For wan thing—herself was a poor hard-workin' woman—an' the choild would be wan if ut lived. 'Twas ten years she carried the saycret—a mortial weight for a wake crayture, an' a Prodesdan' at that, wid no relief av clargy—and it wore her to the grave. On her dyin' bed she confessed ut to me. I had my thoughts av makin' a clane breast, and then—wurra! 'twas the divil at my elbow biddin' me whisht or I'd lose my Peggy that was the pride av me eyes an' the joy av me harrut. An' I held off from Father Haggarty, till I could hould no longer. That was six Aysthers back; and—'Tell the truth,' says his Rever-

ence, 'or you'll get no more of an absolution from me, me fine man, than Micky-would-you-taste-it?' An' at that I stiffened me upper lips an' riz from me marra bones an' wint me way. But the Hand is on me now, an' I've made my paice wid Thim above; an' I'd be glad you'd send for my Peggy to be afther biddin' her ould dada good-bye—more by token she's your Miss Emmeline by rights, and not my purty Peggy at all, at all!"

II

Miss Margaret Donohoe—popularly known in the regiment as "Peggy," and, as it will be remembered, betrothed to Private Dancey Juxon, V. C.—Miss Margaret Donohoe was not summoned to the bedside of her hitherto-reputed father in time to hear from his own lips the secret of her birth. She was trimming an old hat with new crape for mourning exigencies, the day after the Sergeant had been consigned with the usual military honors to the Catholic division of the cemetery, when heavy footsteps sounded in the flagged passage of the Married Quarters, and the Colonel and the Senior Major, both visibly disturbed, walked into Donohoe's clean sanded kitchen, and, in as few words as possible, broke the news.

"It's a terrible shock to you, my poor girl—as it has been to me!" said the Major, very white about the gills. "And to—to another I needn't name!" He was thinking of his Emmie, and how piteously she had sobbed last night and hung about his neck, with her pretty hair all coming down over his mess waistcoat, as she begged him not to send her away from him, because it wasn't her

fault that she had turned out to be Donohoe's daughter and not his own; and how at that moment she was breaking the news to Garthside—that Junior Captain and Victoria Cross hero to whom, it will be remembered, she was engaged. Poor Emmie, poor darling Emmie!—or Peggy, as she ought now to be called! Major Rufford felt that he never would be able to do it. “But—I’ll try and do my duty to you as your father should, and—and I must look to you to—to do as much by me!” he concluded lamely.

“Oh, Major!” cried Peggy—Peggy with the hard, bright, black eyes, the red lips, the tip-tilted nose, the Milesian upper lip, and the coarse but plenteous mane of dark brown hair liberally “banged” in front and arranged behind in massive rope coils, secured by hairpins of imitation tortoiseshell as long as the farrier’s pincers. “Oh, Major! can you ax it? Sure I’ll thrate you as decent as ever I did him that’s gone, an’ the Colonel hears me say it! . . .”

She checked the inclination to weep for one who was, all said and done, no relation, and put her crackling sixpenny-three-farthings black-bordered handkerchief back in her pocket with an air of resolution. A flood of new ideas inundated her brain. All that she had ever dreamed of in the way of the unattainable lay henceforth within her reach, and everything that had hitherto appeared most desirable and possible was from this bewildering hour rendered impossible. Her eyes fell on Private Dancey Juxon, V. C., who had been sitting on the kitchen table when the tall shadow of Sir Alured fell upon the sanded floor, and who had remained, from that moment until this, petrified in an attitude of military respect, against the whitewashed wall; and she

realized that Dancey—Dancey, the Adonis of the rank and file, the hero once desired above all others, wrested at the expense of the most costly and variegated hats and the most dazzling toilettes from the clutches of how many other women!—Dancey must now be numbered among the impossibles. If a cold dash of regret mingled with the inward exultation of Miss Peggy, it was excusable.

“Sure, the dear knows! ’Tis like a tale out av the *Pinny Romancir*,” she said, “an’ troth it’s no wondher av my breath was tuk away wid the surprise. To think of that bould craythur, Donohoe’s wife!——”

“Do you mean your mother, my girl?” began the Colonel, but Peggy gave Sir Alured a look that put him in his place.

“I mane the woman that changed me in me cradle, bad cess to her for a thrickster!” said Peggy, “an’ put her own sojer’s brat in the place av me—me that belonged to the Quality by rights. Not that I’m not pityin’ Miss Emmeline—now that she’s Peggy Donohoe, a poor craythur sprung from nothin’.” The Major turned a groan into a cough, and the Colonel hauled at the ends of his huge white moustache, but the tide of Peggy’s brogue was not to be stemmed. “It’ll be a change for her, it will so, afther livin’ on the fat av the land—an orphan’s pinsion to find her in stirabout, an’ never a chick nor a child in the woide wurruld but her ould Aunt Biddy Kinsella!”

“Who—haw!—is Biddy Kinsella?” broke in the Colonel.

“Av’ she’s alive—an’ a bag av dhry bones she must be av she is,” says Peggy—“it’s at Carricknaclea, in Aher, you may find her. She used to live wid her niece—

manin' Mrs. Donohoe—an' she wint back to Ireland whin me mother died—manin' Mrs. Donohoe agin—a matter av eight years ago. An' 'tis natural Donohoe's daughter would call her to mind at a time like this. Maybe the young woman would go to live wid her," continued Miss Peggy calmly. "An' that brings to me own mind, Major—I mane Papa—whin do ye want me to come home?"

"Home! Oh, Lord!" said the poor Major, before he could stop himself.

"Dee-d cool!" growled Sir Alured, under the huge moustache, squeezing the Major's arm with his great, gaunt, brown hand. "But she's got the right—got the right, Rufford, you know, don't you know. Ha—hum!"

"You shall hear from me soon—very soon, Peggy," said the Major brokenly. "Good-bye for now, my girl." He took her coarse red hand, so unlike his Emmie's, and kissed her equally red cheek; and as he did so the petrified Juxon recovered the temporarily suspended powers of speech and motion, stepped forward, and saluted.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," he began, "and pre-'aps I oughn't to take the freedom; but 'avin' over'eard . . ."

"Saw you, Juxon! Knew you were there! Thought you had a right to hear, you know, don't you know!" said Sir Alured.

But a shrill feminine note of indignation pierced the Colonel's bass, as Miss Peggy cried, "Right! I'd be glad you'd tell me what right you have, Misther Dancey Juxon, to be afther pokin' the nose av you into business that doesn't consarn you, let alone the privit affairs av an officer's daughther. Away wid you, an' larn your place! your room's more welcome than your company; an' if it's a wife you're lookin' afther, maybe when wan

av thim that's av your own station stands up before the priest wid you, I'll be making you a little prisint toward the housekeepin', av the young woman's dacent an' respectable!"

And the bewildered Juxon found himself outside the black-painted door—marked III. in large white numerals—in the character of a lover dismissed.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he said, and said no more, but clinked away in search of the Lethean streams of the canteen.

"Rufford," said Sir Alured solemnly, as the Chief and the second in command exchanged the atmosphere of coals and potato peels prevailing in the Married Quarters for the open air of the barrack square, "I'm confoundedly afraid she's a Tartar! Sharp as a needle, sir, and knowing as a pet fox, if you ask me!"

And the Major said in reply, "These things are supposed to be hereditary. I wonder where she gets it from!" Then he broke out, "I can't believe it, Colonel! I couldn't, if fifty dying men had taken an oath to it. That my poor Clara's girl! It's impossible! If an angel were to come down from Headquarters Above, with despatches confirming the report, I couldn't credit it!"

"And dee-d if I should blame you," the Chief responded. "Breed's bound to show, somewhere, and there's not a drop of good blood in the girl's veins, I'll swear!"

"There's an Irish strain in my family, too," said poor Rufford despondently, "and my Emmie has brown hair and eyes; and her nose, bless it! is a little tilted at the end."

"*A nay retroussy*. So it is, by George! But there are noses and noses, y'know," said Sir Alured. "And Em-

mie's a Rufford, from the crown of her head to the ends of her toes; and we'll prove it, we'll prove it, sir! Donohoe hasn't a leg to stand on"—which was true—"and as to that Mullingar heifer"—thus the Chief designated Peggy—"she'll be sorry one day for throwing Juxon over, mark my words. Send for that old aunt of Donohoe's dead wife—the bag of bones Peggy talked of—and pump her for all she's worth. Turn her inside out!—it's the only advice I can give you, for my head's in as dee-d a muddle as yours. And remember, whatever happens, my Lady is staunch to Emmie! Game woman, my Lady. Doesn't care a dee what society says, as long as—— God bless me, Rufford! I'm talkin' as though Emmie wasn't your daughter. But the whole thing's infernally confusin', you know, don't you know!"

An opinion in which the regiment concurred. An excited beehive would have furnished but a poor comparison to the barracks upon the morrow, when Peggy's great news, imparted in ostentatious secrecy to Mrs. Quartermaster Casey and a few other non-commissioned officers' ladies, had percolated through them. Visitors thronged the Donohoes' quarters; Peggy was the heroine of the hour. Press reporters from the town hung about the barracks on the chance of seeing either of the heroines of what was termed in the local paper "An Extraordinary Romance in Real Life," and the officers' wives called in a body to condole with Emmie Rufford, who, as we have heard, had broken off her engagement with Captain Gerry Garthside.

"I shall not break my heart over things," she had said, with an attempt at being everyday and common-sensible that was plucky, if not convincing, "and I hope you won't dwell too much upon the collapse of our house of

cards. I hope—I pray you'll build more solidly, with—with somebody else. Don't, Gerry! Oh, don't! It's not fair to make my duty harder to do than——”

Then Emmie had broken down, wept wildly, been kissed, consoled, and assured of her lover's undying love and eternal fidelity. Part? Never! Lose such a pearl of a wife! Not for all the Donohoes past, present, or to come! I believe, in spite of Emmie's woe and Captain Gerry Garthside's agitation, the young people secretly enjoyed the scene dramatic; and when Lady Alured came rustling in, about the time when Gerry's eloquence attained its utmost pitch of fervor, and hugged and cried over the hero and heroine of the little drama, that dear woman was not the least happy of the three.

And later on, after returning to quarters, Captain Garthside found a letter on his doormat. The contents of the soiled envelope, directed in a sprawling hand, ran as follows:

“DOOR NO. 3, GROUND-FLOOR, BLOCK Q.

“Miss E. Rufford presents comps And wold be Glad to see Cap Garthside & if Yu will call at 2 remane

“Your Oblidged

“E. RUFFOR”

Of course the Captain knew Peggy Donohoe; had danced with her at non-commissioned officers' balls; given her gloves and chocolates, and sipped the roses of her cheek in common with many another passing admirer. “And who'd be the worse of a kiss,” as Peggy would have said, “from a dacent girl?” “Dacent” she undoubtedly was, if not from pure innate virtue, perhaps from the consciousness that a depreciation in marketable value attaches to goods that have been soiled by

handling. Had it been otherwise, the state of Major Rufford had been less gracious, thought Captain Gerry Garthside.

And he looked at Emmie's photograph standing in a silver frame upon his mantelshelf, and remembered the piteous smile with which she had told him that everything must now be over between them, and mentally renewed his vows of fealty before he went round to "look up Peggy."

The rooms occupied by the late Sergeant Donohoe were three—a kitchen and two bedchambers. One of these latter, Peggy, with the assistance of Mrs. Quartermaster Casey, a dozen yards of cheap Liberty muslin, a gross of Japanese fans, one or two pieces of Oriental drapery, and a few articles of furniture of the tottery bamboo kind, had converted for the time being into a boudoir. Only for the time being, she said to herself, because when she got her rights she would enjoy all the splendors now usurped by the real Peggy Donohoe—Miss Emmie, as she called the usurper when she forgot, which was not often. She would dress for dinner every evening, and attend balls and theaters in low-necked, long-trained frocks, chaperoned by Lady Alured, adorned with the late Mrs. Rufford's diamond stars, and attended by Captain Gerry Garthside, V. C. For not one, but all the possessions held and prerogatives hitherto enjoyed by the false Miss Rufford would naturally devolve to the real one, once formally recognized and received by her papa and the regiment; the "ould duds" and bits of sticks once pertaining to the supposed Margaret Donohoe being transferred to the veritable Peggy, together with all rights in Private Dancey Juxon, V. C. The topsy-turvy, comic-operatic whimsicality of her own idea did not ap-

peal to Peggy's sense of humor. She was very much in earnest as she waited for her visitor, seated in state upon one of her own ornamental chairs, her red hands—hands which could not be transferred to the real Peggy Donohoe with the other things—folded in her lap.

"She's here, Captain," Mrs. Quartermaster Casey—retained as chaperon until Lady Alured should awaken to a sense of her duties—had said, opening the door.

"Oh, Captain," said Peggy, rising coyly, "is it yourself?"

And, owning the soft impeachment as he squeezed the red hand (Gerry Garthside's manners to the plainest woman were fatally caressing), the Captain inquired how he could serve her.

"Sure," said Peggy, making play with her fine eyes, "you'll maybe thinking me forward, Captain, for makin' the first sign. But me papa—the Major—will be takin' up a great dale of me toime by-an'-by, and wid Mrs. Casey sittin' in the kitchen widin call, we're givin' no handle to the tongue of scandal, as the sayin' is——"

"My dear Miss Peggy!—" the Captain was beginning, when Peggy took him up short.

"I'll trouble you," she said, "to remimber that I'm not takin' any more Peggy from anywan, high or low, an' I'd be glad it was ginerally known. 'Miss Emmeline,' or 'Emmie' for short, you're free to use, or any pet name ye may pick." She cast a languishing glance upon Captain Gerry. "I'm not likely to quarrel wid it"—she moved nearer—"or wid you. Och, thin! but 'tis quare how things have turned round wid me! Peggy Donohoe a week ago, an' walkin' out wid Dancey Juxon—an' now—the Major's daughter, an' your promised bride, Captain jewel! Sure 'tis like a dhrame, it is!"

And Peggy rested her rather large head upon the shoulder of the astonished Captain, who hastily withdrew the support.

"Look here, Peggy, my girl!" he said hastily. "What's this notion you've got into your noddle? You don't think . . ."

"I think that you're a gintleman, Captain," said Peggy, with a tender smile, "and would never go back on the promise you gev to the Major's daughter. An' now that I'm her, an' she's me, you'll do your duty by me, as Dancey Juxon will do his to Donohoe's poor unfortunate girl. You may thrust him. We've had it out betune us, an' he's with her now."

"With—her—now?" repeated the bewildered Captain.

"I sent him to the Major's—I mane papa's—quarters ten minnits ago, wid a flea in his ear!" said Peggy, folding her red hands about the elbow of her captive, and rubbing her cheek against his shoulder strap. "'I dar' you,' sez I, 'to hang about here,' sez I, 'makin' sheep's eyes at a daughter av the Quality, whin that poor crature you gev your promise to is cryin' her two eyes out for the gliff av a glimpse av your red head. Away wid you,' sez I, 'an' prove yourself a man av your word, Dancey Juxon, or maybe Peggy Donohoe'll be takin' the law av you wan av these fine days!'"

"My good girl," said Gerry Garthside, almost pleadingly, "you can't really believe what you say you've told Juxon—that he is obliged to marry Miss Rufford, or the lady who has borne that name until now, because he happens to have given a promise of marriage to Peggy Donohoe, and Miss Rufford and Peggy have changed places?"

"I mane that!" Peggy's black eyes snapped out

sparks of fire; as she tossed her head, a loosened coil of black hair tumbled upon her shoulder. Her fine bust heaved, her cheeks burned scarlet—she had never looked finer in her life. “Do I not mane just that? Think! Isn’t her father mine? Isn’t her home my home?—the dhress she wears upon her back mine?—the ring she has upon the finger av her mine? Ah, musha, an’ the man that put it there!” Her grasp on Captain Gerry’s arm tightened, her eyes sought his and held his; her warm, fragrant breath came and went about his face like a personal caress. “Sure, dear, you’ll not regret ut,” said Peggy, “for I loved you iver since I clapped my two eyes on you—I take the Blessed Saints to witness! An’ Dancey Juxon’ll be dacent to Donohoe’s daughter, an’ you an’ me will be afther lendin’ the young couple a hand, lettin’ her have the washin’ maybe, or the waitin’ at our table—or by-an’-by”—she lowered her black lashes—“she might come as nurse to the children. So, darlin’ . . .”

The sentence was never finished, for the alarmed Captain broke from the toils and fled. The Mess story goes that he double-locked his outer door, barricaded the inner one with a chest of drawers and a portable tin shower bath, and spent the rest of the day in reconnoitering from behind the window curtains in anticipation of a descent of the enemy. But in reality he bent his steps toward the North Quadrangle, where the Major’s quarters were, and over the familiar blue crockery window boxes full of daffodils, he caught a glimpse of Emmie’s sweet face, not pale or bearing marks of secretly shed tears as when he last kissed it, but bright-eyed, flushed, and dimpling with laughter as she nodded and waved her hand to a departing visitor, who, ab-

sorbed in the charming vision, glimpsed above the daffodils, collided with and cannoned off the Captain.

"Hullo! You, Juxon?"

"Beg pardon, sir," said Private Juxon, rigidly at the salute. "I 'ope I 'aven't 'urt you!" He grinned happily.

"Have you come into a fortune, or inherited a title? You look pretty chirpy!" said the Captain.

"Not a bad 'it of 'is by 'arf," said Private Juxon critically to Private Juxon, "about the comin' into a title. 'For,' says she, *'the greatest gentleman in the land couldn't 'ave done more—and though I can't accept your offer, I shall always look up to you and respect you as the most chivalrousest and honorablest man I ever met!'* Wot price me, after that?"

For, as may be guessed, Private Juxon had proposed, and been rejected. Standing very stiff and red and upright on the passage door mat, he had confessed his sense of responsibility and explained his views.

"The general run of feelin' in the regiment bein' the same, Miss, as her own, that I'm bound as a man to keep my promise to Peggy Donohoe, whether she's you or you are 'er. I've took the freedom of callin' to say as wot I'm ready," said Juxon. "An' the weddin' was to come off in June; but you've only got to name an earlier day, Miss, an' I'll 'ave the banns put up, you not bein' a Catholic, like Peggy—which I ought to call 'er Miss Rufford now, as owing to 'er station, Miss. But if you think I'll ever come short in duty an' respect to the Major's daughter, because she's turned out to be only the Sergeant's, you're wrong, Miss, you're wrong—upon my bloo—upon my 'tarnal soul!"

And then it was that Emmie Rufford conferred upon Private Juxon the title of nobility, which made him a

proud man—and unconditionally refused his offer, making him a happy one.

She is now married to Captain Gerry Garthside, who yet fulfilled his engagement to the Senior Major's daughter in leading her to the altar. For within a week the bubble had burst, topsy-turvydom reigned no more, the barracks ceased to seethe like one of its own mess cauldrons, and Peggy Donohoe was compelled to relinquish the privilege of calling Major Rufford "Papa." For old Aunt Biddy Kinsella had been discovered in the smokiest corner of her grandson's cottage at Carricknaclea, in Aher, by a smart young solicitor's clerk; and her sworn deposition, duly marked with her cross and attested by her parish priest, dispersed the clouds of doubt from the Major's horizon, relieved Sir Alured's moustache from an unusual strain, and proved the deceased Mrs. Donohoe to have been the victim of a delusion.

"For 'twas at Buttevant Barracks where the regiment was stationed nineteen years ago, an' me stayin' on a visit wid me niece, that I saw her—Maggie Donohoe—rest her unaisy soul, the misfortnit craythur!—I saw her change the children's clothes wid the two eyes I have in my head," said Aunt Biddy Kinsella, "barrin' that only wan av thim was at the keyhole. 'Och, murdher!' sez I, lettin' a screech an' flyin' in on her—for I had the use av me legs in thim days—'what have you done, woman, asthore?' 'Made a lady av little Peggy,' says she, wid the fingers av her hooked like claws ready to fly at me, 'an' I dar' you to bethray me.' 'Bethray!' sez I. 'It's bethrayed her to the divil, you mane—that she'll be brought up a black Prodesdan', and not a dacent Catholic, as a Donohoe should be by rights.' 'Holy Virgin, forgive me! Sure, I never thought av that!' sez herself,

and all thrimblin' we undhressed the children an changed the clothes again. An' a day or so afther the Major's baby was waned an' wint back to uts mother. But Maggie Donohoe was niver the same in her mind afther that day. Sit an' brood she would, an' hour by hour; an' creep out av her own bed an' into mine night afther night, and wake me wid her cowl'd hand upon me mouth an' the whisper in me ear to know had she given little Peggy's sowl to the divil or changed the childhren back afther all! An' as years wint on she kem to a quieter mind, but on her dyin' bed the ould fear and thrimblin' got hould av her ag'in, an' she tould Donohoe—not what she'd done at all, at all!—but what she wanst had the intintion av doin', but that her heart failed her; an' so made a fool av the man that owned her, as many another woman has done before!"

Thus Aunt Biddy Kinsella, who, having spoken, may be dismissed to her smoky corner under the turf thatch, where a greasy parcel reached her in the middle of the following June, containing, not an olive branch, but a concrete slab of wedding cake, with the joint compliments of Mr. and Mrs. Dancey Juxon. For "the general run of feelin' in the regiment" was in favor of Private Juxon's renewing his matrimonial engagements to Peggy Donohoe, now that she had been proved, past all doubt, to be herself. And by the last advices received from headquarters it appears that Mrs. Lance-Corporal Juxon is acting at this moment as nurse to the Garthside baby.

PONSONBY AND THE PANTHERESS

I HAVE called this story "Ponsonby and the Pantheress," because Ponsonby's nocturnal visitor undoubtedly belonged to the genus *Carnaria*, species *F. pardus*, the *Pardalis* of the ancients. The whole thing hinges on Ponsonby's getting a ticket of invitation to a mighty dinner given by one of the great City Livery Companies. Had he refused the invitation, and stayed at home with Mrs. Ponsonby, it would have been better for him—and for her. He would not to-day have been a silent, atrabilious man, who goes upon his way in loneliness—that mated loneliness which is of all desolate conditions on this earth the most desolate—with a vampire gnawing underneath his waistcoat. She would not have been a much-wronged, cruelly neglected woman—or the other type of sufferer, the woman who has been found out; and forever robbed of that which women hold dearest in life—the power to create illusions.

It was a great dinner at that City Hall—a feast both succulent and juicy, and upon a scale so prodigious as to put it utterly beyond the power of a single-stomached man to do justice thereto. Many of the guests had thoughtfully provided themselves with several of these necessary organs, but Ponsonby—who had recently sold out of the Army, and invested his commission money in business, and settled down with Mrs. Ponsonby in a neat

little house in Sloane Street—was still young, and fairly slim.

The baked meats and confectionery were excellent, and “the drinks”—as Betsey Prig might have observed—“was good.” It was revealed to Ponsonby that he had absorbed a considerable quantity only by the swollen condition of his latchkey when he tried to fit it into the door of the little house in Sloane Street. But after a short struggle the door opened, and Ponsonby paused a moment on the doorstep to take some observations on the weather. It was just one o’clock as he looked at his watch in the moonlight. Ponsonby was reminded of Indian moons by the lucent brightness of the broad silver orb that floated so majestically on the calm bosom of the dark overhead. She was getting near her wane, but only notifying it by an exaggerated handsomeness, like a professional Society beauty. Ponsonby thought of that simile—all by himself—and was proud of it, as he had always been a man more celebrated for his moustache than his intellect. He tied a knot in his mental pocket handkerchief to remember it by, and, facing round to go into the house, was a little disconcerted to find the hall door gaping to receive him.

Then he went in, barred and bolted very carefully, and set the spring burglar alarm—for once. Ponsonby was unusually careful and deliberate in his movements on this particular night. Then he sat down on the hall bench and took off his boots. Then he switched off the electric hall light. Then he pondered whether he should or should not have just one brandy and soda before going to bed—because he had come home so clear and calm and cool-headed from that City dinner. Ay or No—and the Ayes had it. He went into the dining-room.

It had been furnished for the Ponsonbys on the best authority; in oak, with Brummagem-Benares brass pots and tea trays. The window curtains, and the drapery which hung before a deepish recess in the wall to the left of the door as you entered, were plush, of that artistic shade of olive-green which is so shabby when it is new that you can't tell when it gets old. The recess had originally been intended for a book case; but young married people just starting in life never have any books—they are too much bound up in each other—and so it had been covered up. You can put things behind a covering of this sort which you do not care to expose to the gaze of the casual guest—a row of old slippers, or a pile of superannuated Army Lists, or a collection of summonses—or the Family Skeleton.

Ponsonby switched on the light, and opened the liquor case with his watch-chain key, and got a tumbler and soda siphon from the buffet, and lighted a cigar. Then he sat down in an armchair, unbuttoned his white waistcoat, loosened his collar, and prepared to be lonelily convivial. He thought of his girl-like bride asleep upstairs, with her cheek upon her hand, and her gold-brown hair swamping the pillow. It says much for the state of Ponsonby's affections, that while he knew the uses of the monthly half pint of peroxide which was an unfailing item on the chemist's bill, he could still be poetical about that tinge of gold. But newly married men seldom look into the roots of anything. He lifted his glass and drank her health. "To Mamie!" he said, as the frisky gas bubbles snapped at his nose. And then he glanced over the edge of the tumbler at the curtained recess behind the door. And the short hairs of his head rose up and began to promenade. And his teeth clicked against

the glass he held. For a bolt of ice had shot through either ear orifice straight to his brain. In other words—Something had laughed—an ugly laugh—behind that drawn curtain.

In another moment it was put aside. A woman came out of the recess that had concealed her, and stood before him.

Not to mince matters, she belonged to the class we are content to call unfortunate. From her tawdry bonnet to the mud-befouled hem of her low-necked silk dress—a preposterous garment, grease-stained and ragged, and partly hidden by an opera cloak of sullied whiteness—the nature of her profession was written on her from head to foot. She was not without beauty, or the archæological traces of what had been it; but as she grinned at the astonished man, showing two rows of strong square teeth, yellowed with liquor and cigarette smoking, and the gathered muscles of her cheeks pushed up her under lids, narrowing her fierce, greedy eyes to mere slits, and the hood of her soiled mantle fell back from her coarsely dyed hair, she was a thing unlovely. She seemed to snuff the air with her broad nostrils, as scenting prey; she worked her fingers in their dirty white gloves, as though they were armed with talons that longed to tear and rend; and, as she did so, Ponsonby was irresistibly reminded of a panther.

Ponsonby had shot panthers in India, and had once been slightly mauled by a female specimen. It was an odd coincidence that the old scars on his left shoulder and thigh should have begun to burn and throb and shoot unpleasantly as the yellow-white fangs of the intruder gleamed upon him, framed in by her grinning, painted lips.

But Ponsonby recovered himself after a moment, and asked her, without ceremony, how the devil she came there? He was not a particularly bright man, but he knew, even as he asked. She had been crouching in the shadow under the portico—some of the Sloane Street houses have porticoes—when his cab drove up. She had watched him get out. Then, when he had been standing with his foolish back to the open door, gaping at the moon, the Pantheress had skulked in, with the noiseless, cushioned step that distinguishes her race. And now he had to get rid of her.

Which was not as easy a task as one might think.

He began by telling her that he was a married man.

"Knew that," said the Pantheress. "Saw you take off your boots in the hall. Saw you drink her health." She mimicked him. "To Mamie!" And laughed again—that unspeakably jarring laugh.

Ponsonby grew irate. He took his courage in both hands and went into the hall, where he softly undid the door fastenings. Then he came back, and offered to show his visitor out.

She was in the act of pocketing a silver race cup, won by Ponsonby at a Pony Hurdle Handicap on the Bombay course in 1890, when Ponsonby came back. He caught her wrist and bade her drop it. She gave it up sullenly. Then, with a sudden accession of feminine meekness, she said she would go—if he would stand her a drink.

It seemed a cheap bargain. The unwitting Ponsonby got out another glass from the buffet cupboard, and mixed her a brandy and soda, not too weak. She drew a chair—his wife's chair—to the table, and sat down, throwing her dingy cloak from her whitewashed shoul-

ders. She put her hand to her head, and drew thence a long steel pin with a blue glass head, and took her gaudy bonnet off and threw it on the table. She did not hurry over the consumption of the liquid, and Ponsonby began to grow impatient. When he hinted this, she asked for a cigar.

He gave her one, and a light. And she drained the last drop in the tumbler, and stuck the burning weed between her teeth, with a coarse masquerade of masculinity. Ponsonby heaved a sigh of relief.

"Now, my girl, come along—time's up!" He started for the door.

The Pantheress got up, and leaned against the mantel shelf, smoking. She intimated that she had changed her mind—and would remain. Ponsonby lost his temper, and threatened ejection by main force.

"Put me out? You daren't!" rejoined the Pantheress. She added some adjectives reflecting upon Ponsonby and the honor of his family—but with those we have nothing to do.

Ponsonby's under jaw came out, and his forehead lowered. He strode toward the Pantheress; her sex was not going to plead for that delicate piece of femininity, it was evident.

"I daren't, eh?"

"You daren't. Because I'd tear, and scratch, and scream, I would—till the police came—till your wife woke up and came downstairs to see what the row was about. Nice for you, then! Easy for you to explain—with *two* glasses on the table!"

Ponsonby broke into a cool perspiration. He spake in his soul and cursed himself for a fool—of all fools the one most thoroughly impregnated with foolery. For he

saw that he had been trapped. The Pantheress rocked upon her hips and laughed, shaking out a coarse aroma of patchouli from her shabby garments.

"You had me in and stood me drinks. I can swear to that. My swell toff, I think you'd better knock under!"

Ponsonby had to arrive at that conclusion, thinking of his wedded happiness and the golden-brown hair scattered on the pillow upstairs. He was awed to the pitch of making overtures—of asking the Pantheress how much she would take to go?

The Pantheress sprang high. Twenty pounds.

Ponsonby had not as much in the house. With great difficulty, and much exercise of eloquence, he got her to bate five. It was necessary that she should be brought to forego another five, for all the ready cash he could muster did not amount to much more than ten. How to attain this desirable end? Ponsonby had a dramatic inspiration.

He had read many novels and seen many plays. In most of these the main plot turned upon the ultimate victory of Human Virtue and Truth over Vice and Dis-integrity. In these books or dramas Vice was generally personified by an adventuress—a brazen, defiant person, who had made up her mind to ruin somebody or another; and Virtue, by an innocent girl or pure young wife, who pleaded until the hardened heart was melted, the fierce eyes moistened by an unaccustomed tear—until, in short, the naughty woman abandoned her unhallowed purpose and left the nice one mistress of the field. The theory is an admirable one in a book or in a play, but in real life it does not hold good. Ponsonby has since learned this; but at that time he was youngish and inexperienced.

He would weave a net, with those golden-brown tresses upstairs, in which to catch the Pantheress. He begged her to listen, and told his story quite prettily. He explained how, three years before, his regiment having newly returned from India, he had met at a certain South Coast resort, separated by a mile or two of arid common from a great dockyard town, a lovely girl. She was a friendless orphan, the daughter of a clergyman, had been a governess, had broken down in health, and with the last remnant of her little savings, taken a humble lodging near the sea, in order to benefit by the ozone. How she had found, during her innocent strolls on the beach, not only that health of which she had been in search, but a husband. And, finally, how every fiber of her soul, being naturally bound up in that husband, and her present state of health delicate, the infliction of such a blow as the Pantheress contemplated striking might not only strike at the roots of love, but of life.

With which peroration counsel concluded, not wholly dissatisfied with himself. He wiped his brow, and sent a hopeful glance at the Pantheress. Her features had not softened, nor was her eye dimmed. Her lips twitched, certainly, but the convulsive movement was merely the herald of a yawn.

"You're a good one to jaw!" she said, when he had finished. "Come, I'll not be hard on you. How much have you got?"

He named the amount.

"Hand out!" the Pantheress bade him.

He would give her half the sum then and there, Ponsonby said, with a gleam of strategic cunning, and the other half when she was fairly outside the hall door—not before.

100 PONSONBY AND THE PANTHERESS

The Pantheress nodded, and clutched the first installment from his hand greedily, and caught her dirty bonnet from the table and threw it on her head. "No larks!" she said warningly—"come on!" and moved to the room door, where she paused. "Ain't you got manners enough to open it for a lady?" she remarked in an aggrieved tone. Ponsonby, hastily restoring the tell-tale second glass to the sideboard, sprang forward and grasped the handle—and dropped it as though it had been red-hot, for he had caught the sound of footsteps—light, regular, measured footsteps—descending the stairs. He could not utter a word. He turned a white face and glaring eyes upon the Pantheress. And the steps came nearer. As the dining-room door opened, he fell back, helplessly, behind it. The wall seemed to open and swallow him—thick, suffocating folds fell before his face; he had backed into the curtained recess whence the Pantheress had emerged thirty fateful minutes previously. Through a three-cornered rent in the stuff, just the height of his eye from the ground, and through which that beast of prey had probably watched him, he looked—and saw his wife!

She wore a loose white wrapping gown; her hair—the hair—hung in waves about her shoulders. Barring the bedroom candle she carried, and losing sight of her prosaic nineteenth-century surroundings, she resembled one of Burne Jones's angels. But her calm expression changed, and her voice was tuned to a key of unangelic indignation, as her glance lighted on the painted, brazen Defiance, erect and bristling, before her.

"You . . . a woman, what do you want? How did you?—how dared you come here?"

The Pantheress was about, in answer, to launch the

first of an elaborate flight of insults, couched in the easy vernacular of Leicester Square, when she stopped short. Her thick lips rolled back from her gleaming fangs in a triumphant grin. She bent forward, with her hands upon her thighs, and made a close inspection of the face of Ponsonby's wife.

"*What! Luce?*" . . .

The other recoiled, with a slight cry. And Ponsonby, in his retirement, was conscious of a deadly qualm—for Mrs. Ponsonby's Christian name was Lucy! When he opened his shut eyes and peeped through the rent again, it was only to receive a fresh shock—for Mrs. Ponsonby and the Pantheress were sitting, one on either side of the table, chatting like old friends.

"Luck was poor," the Pantheress was saying, "and me low down in my spirits. So when I found the door of a swell house like this open, 'I'll pop in,' says I to myself, 'and look about for a snack of something and a drop to drink, and then make off if I can, clear, or else go to quod—like a lady.' And I did pop in—and I did look about—and the first thing that turns up is—you! On a smooth lay, ain't you? Always a daring one, you were. A clergyman's daughter, and an orphan! We've most of us been clergymen's daughters and orphans in our time, but not a girl of us ever looked it more than you. And you're married! Ha! ha! With a swell church service, and singin', and a Continental tour to give the orphan a little change of scenery. She'd seen so little in her time, the poor dear! Lord! I shall die of it!"

The woman rocked with silent laughter. It seemed to the man behind the curtain that her eyes, across his wife's shoulder, glared full into his—that her coarse jeers were leveled at him. He could not have uttered a

102 PONSONBY AND THE PANTHERESS

sound, or stirred a finger, for the dear life. A kind of catalepsy had possessed him. But he saw them drink together, and heard them talk . . . turning over with conversational pitchforks the unspeakable horrors of the dunghill whence his white butterfly had taken wing. . . . Ponsonby had never been an imaginative man, but that midnight conference wrought his sensibilities to such a pitch that, leaning against the wall in the corner of the curtained recess, he quietly fainted.

* * * * *

He came back to consciousness in darkness through which struggled no gleam of light. He did not know where he was until he staggered out from behind the stifling draperies and switched on the light with shaking hands. Then he found himself in his own dining-room. There were no glasses on the table—the spring bar of the liquor stand was in its place, the brandy decanter was, as he remembered to have left it, half full. He found his candle on the sideboard and lighted it, and went into the hall. The hall door was barred and bolted.

“Thank God, I *have* been dreaming!” said Ponsonby, and went upstairs.

There she lay—a breathing picture of reposeful innocence—fast asleep. Ponsonby stooped and kissed the hair that flooded her pillow and invaded his own, and silently swore by all his deities that he would never go to another City dinner as long as he lived. Before he crept into bed he knelt down—a thing he had not done since he was a boy—and said awkwardly, “O God, I’m glad it was a dream! Thank you!”

He slept the sleep of the weary, and rose, not a giant, it is true, but very much refreshed. He dandered down to the breakfast table in a leisurely way, humming a

tune. As he shook out his newspaper, the absurdity and improbability of his recent vision struck him for the first time; he laughed until he ached. Then he dropped his newspaper, and stooped to pick it up. Something bright that lay upon the carpet under the table attracted his notice. The man put forth his hand and took it, and his ruddy morning face underwent a strange and ghastly alteration. For the thing was a long steel bonnet pin, with a vulgar blue glass head! Men have died suddenly of pin pricks before now.

But Ponsonby's tortures are lingering. He is alive still, and she is still Mrs. Ponsonby. He has never spoken—the Secret of the Blue Glass Pin is hidden from the woman who walks Life's path with him. But sometimes she is haunted by a dreadful Doubt, and at all times he is bestridden by an overwhelming Certainty.

A FAT GIRL'S LOVE STORY

IN THREE PARTS

I

THE first thing I remember being told is that I was a Parksop, and the second that it was worth while living, if only to have that name. Some years after, it dawned upon me that we had got very little else.

Father was a landed proprietor upon a reduced scale, and a parent on a large one. There were twelve of us, counting Prenderby, who had passed into the Army a few years previously, and passed out of it later on at the unanimous request of his superior officers. Father cut him off with a shilling—which he forgot to send him—and sternly forbade him to bear the name of Parksop any more. He has done well since, and attributes his rise in life entirely to that deprivation. Nobody ever writes to Prenderby except Charlotte.

If an abnormally fat girl could possibly be the heroine of a romantic love story, Charlotte—"Podge," as she has been nicknamed ever since I can remember—would stand in that relation to this narrative. But, you know, such a thing isn't possible. If it had been, Belle, who comes in between Podge and Prenderby, and is the acknowledged beauty of the family, having all the hereditary Parksop points besides several of her own, nobody would have wondered.

How did the story begin? With Roderick and me—

coming home to spend a vacation. It was likely to be a pretty long one, for the Head of the School had behaved in a most ungentlemanly way, showing absolutely crass insensibility, as father said, to the advantage of having one of the best names in England on his school list, while it remained written at the bottom of a check for fifty-nine pounds, odd shillings, and half-pence, marked by a groveling-spirited bank cashier "No Assets."

You may guess Roddy and me didn't grumble much—the Parksops have never been strong in grammar and orthography, so I'm not going to apologize for a slip here and there—didn't grumble much at hearing that we were to stay at home for the present, and be "brought on" by the curate in Euclid and Latin and Greek, and all the rest of the rot. He wouldn't strike for wages, father knew, because for one thing he was very modest and shy, and for another he was spoons on Belle. If he wasn't, why was he always glaring at our pew in church? And for the same reason we shouldn't be overworked—a thing the most reckless boys acknowledge to be bad for them. So the morning after our return we went down to breakfast feeling as jolly as could be.

Father shook hands with us in his lofty way. We could see that he was deeply indignant with the Head from the way in which his aquiline nose hooked itself when we gave him a letter we'd brought with us. We almost wished we had torn it up, because, having made up our minds to go fishing that morning, we had meant to ask him for the key of the old boat house by the pond, where the punt was kept, which key, with a disregard of opportunity quite unnatural, as Roddy said—in a man with so large a family—he always kept hidden away.

Belle gave us two fingers to shake and her ear to kiss, and the others, as many as were allowed to breakfast with the elders, crowded round, and then Podge came bouncing in and hugged us for everybody. We didn't care about the hugging, because it was such a smothering business, like sinking into a sea of eiderdown, Roddy used to say, who was imaginative for a Parksop. And here, as it's usual to describe a heroine—though I don't acknowledge her for one, you know—it would be best to describe Podge a little.

It describes her kind of temper pretty well to say that she didn't mind being called Podge—even before strangers. The name describes her exactly. You couldn't tone it down and call her plump; she was simply one of the fattest girls you ever saw. Her large face was rosy, and usually beamed, as people say in books, with smiles and good temper. Her hair was black, and done up in the way that took the least time, and her eyes were black and bright, and would have been big if her face had been a little less moonlike. She had little dumpy hands and little dumpy feet, rather pretty—in fact, the only family landmarks, as Belle said, that had not been effaced by the rising tide of fat. In a regular story there is always something about the heroine's waist: not that I give in to Podge being—you know! I suppose she had a waist; at least, it was possible to tell where her frock bodies left off and her skirts began—then. It isn't now! The frocks were always old, because whenever Podge had a new one she gave it to Belle, and you couldn't deny that Belle did them more justice. Then, she had a nice kind of voice, though the Parksop drawl had been left out of it, and I think that's all—except that, considering her beam, she moved about

lightly, and that she always sat down like a collapsing feather bed and got up like an expanding balloon.

Breakfast didn't make the school commons look very foolish. There wasn't much difference, except that the coffee wasn't so groundy. Father had his little dish of something special—kidneys, this time—and Roddy, sitting at his right hand—we were treated as guests the first day at home—dived in under his elbow when he was deep in his coffee cup and harpooned half a one. Of course, he had to bolt it before father came to the surface, and Podge was dreadfully anxious, seeing him so purple in the face, lest he should choke.

I did as well as I could with my rasher of bacon and hers, and I remember her whispering to me, just before Nuddles came in with the Squire's card, that the house-keeping money had been lately more limited than ever. And as I looked across the table, out at the window, and over the green, rolling Surrey landscape—all Parksop property in our ancestors' times—and remembered that such a small slice of it was left to be divided between such a lot of us, it did occur to me that it would have been better if they—meaning the ancestors—had been a little less Parksopian in the way of not being able to keep what they had got. Then Nuddles, the butler, came in with Squire Braddlebury's card, and the curtain drew up—we had had a performance of one of the plays of Terence that very half year, and I had done the part of a dumb slave to everybody's admiration—and the curtain drew up on what would have been "Podge's Romance," if Podge had only been thinner.

II

Father broke up the breakfast party with getting up and going out. As a rule nobody dared push back his or her chair until *he* had finished, and when he took it into his head to read one of the leaders in the *Times* aloud to us, we had to make up our minds to spend the afternoon. But as a rule he went to the library as soon as he'd done, and worked until lunch. He usually worked leaning back in his armchair, with his feet on a footstool, and a silk handkerchief thrown over his head. He went to the library now, to meet the Squire, whose gruff "Good morning" Roddy and I heard as father opened the door. He didn't quite shut it afterward, and as Roddy and I stood by the hall table, carefully sewing up the sleeves of the Squire's covert coat—for Podge had given us each a neat pocket needle-and-thread case, to teach us to be tidy, she said, and a taste for practical joking isn't incompatible with lofty lineage—we couldn't help hearing some of the conversation.

It was most of it on the Squire's side, and the words "title deeds," "unentailed," and "mortgage" occurred over and over again. Then "unpaid," "due notice," "neglected," and, finally, "foreclosure." Perhaps it was father's giving a hollow groan at this, and being seen by me through the crack of the library door to tear his hair, beautifully white, without tearing any of it out, that made me listen. At any rate, I left Roddy busy with the coat, and—any other boy, even a Parksop by birth, would have done as much under the circumstances.

Well, I made out that Squire Braddlebury had got father on toast. It became quite plain to me, boy as I

was, that he could, whenever he chose, strip us of the last remaining hundreds of our old acres, and send us, generally, packing to Old Gooseberry—with a word. Then he asked father why he thought he didn't say the word then and there? and father said something about respect for ancient title and hereditary something or other; and Squire Braddleybury, who had made his vulgar money in trade, said ancient title and hereditary something or other might be dee'd. And then——

"I'll tell you why, Parksop," he blustered. "It's because of your girl! When you came to me for money to waste on your gobbling, selfish old self, caring, not you, not one snap whether your family went bare for the rest o' their lives, so long as you got what you wanted for the rest of yours, I lent you the cash on your title deeds, signed by Edward Plantagenet—and more fool he to waste good land on you! I lent you the cash, I say, because I knew you'd not come up to the mark when pay day came, and I wanted your girl. What's that you say? Belle! Not if I know it! Sandy hair and aquiline profiles don't agree with me. I mean Miss Charlotte. She's a fine, full figure of a woman; she's a good 'un, too! Don't I know how she keeps your house a-going? Don't I know how she makes and mends, plans and contrives, teaches the children when your foreign governesses take French leave, because they can't get their wages out of you, Parksop, and does the Lord knows what besides! I shouldn't have spoken so soon, but another fellow's got his eye on her—Noel, the parson—you know who I mean. I believe they're secretly engaged, or something."

"Gracious Heavens!" cried father.

"If they are," growled the Squire, "it don't matter. We'll soon put the curate to the right-about, and on the day I take her to church you'll get your title deeds back.

You're reasonable, I see. It's a bargain. So go and fetch her, Parksop; go and fetch her."

There was a scroop and shriek of overstrained springs and tortured leather. The Squire had thrown himself into father's armchair. I had only time to drag Roddy behind the green baize door that shuts off the servants' wing from the rest of the house, when father came out of the library.

III

The whole house was topsy-turvy. The secret of the mortgage was out, for one thing. Everybody knew that the Squire had proposed to Podge, that Podge had said "No" to him, in spite of father's dignified commands, and that the Squire had rushed out of the house, foaming at the mouth, with his coat half on and half off, stormed his way round to the stables, where he saddled his horse himself, and galloped homeward, scattering objurgations, threats, and imprecations right and left.

"Stuck-up paupers! Make Parksop know better! Sell 'em up, stick and stone! Prefer d——d curate to me, Thomas Braddlebury! Fool! Must be crazy!"

Roddy and I and everybody else agreed with him, except Podge. She was regularly downright obstinate. She had given in to all of us all her life, and now, just when her giving in meant so much, she wouldn't. What was the good of beginning, we asked, if she didn't intend to go on? We were very severe with her, because she deserved it. Falling in love at her size—like a milkmaid—and with an elderly curate—an old-young man, with shabby clothes and a stoop! Belle had put up with his staring at our pew when he read the Litany on Sundays, but now that she was quite sure he hadn't been doing it

because of her, she regarded it as an unpardonable insult. She stirred up father to write to the Rector demanding Mr. Noel's instant dismissal, and the Rector sent back an old, unsettled claim for tithe money, and referred father to the Bishop of the diocese.

Meanwhile, Podge was the victim of love. It was really funny. She cried quarts at night, according to Belle. Her red nose and swollen eyes made her funnier still. And old Noel stooped more going about his parish work. He was a gentleman—that was one thing to be said for him—and if two perfectly healthy lives had not stood between him and the title, he'd have been a baronet, with a rent roll worth having, the Rector's wife said.

They say dropping wears away a stone. We dropped on Podge from morning till night, and she gave in at last. She put on her hat and trotted down to the Rectory—waddled would be the best word. She saw Noel, and had it out *vivâ voce*. She'd tried to do it by letter—Belle found a torn-up note of dismissal in her room, beginning "My lost Darling." We yelled over the notion of old Noel being Podge's lost darling; almost before we'd done yelling she was back again, and had smothered the little ones all round, and gone to the library with a flag of truce—a wet pocket handkerchief—to announce the capitulation to father. She spoke to me afterward, looked appealing, as if she wanted to be praised for doing a simple thing like that for her family! I didn't praise her, and Roddy gave her even less encouragement.

The Squire was sent for by special messenger, and came without hurrying. He said he was glad she'd come to her senses and showed a proper appreciation of the gifts Providence had placed within her reach. He brought a diamond engagement ring, which wouldn't go on the proper finger. We laughed again at that; we were

always laughing in those days. And he gave father one of the title deeds back, and stayed to dinner, and had a little music in the drawing-room afterward, and kissed Podge when he went away, at which Roddy and I and Belle nearly went into convulsions, and in a little time the wedding day was fixed.

As it came near, Podge didn't get any thinner. She ate her dinner just as usual, and smothered the children a good deal. She was to have half a dozen or so of them to live with her; she stipulated for that, and the Squire grinned and scowled and said, "All right, for the present!" He turned out to be quite generous, and tipped us sovereigns and Belle jewelry and new frocks, and she said every time she tried them on that she had quite come to regard him as a relative. Everybody had except Podge, and I dare say if you'd asked her she'd have said *she* was the person whose opinion mattered most. You never know how selfish unselfish people can be till they're tried! It's true the Squire was awfully ugly and as rough as a bear, and a little too fond of drinks that made his temper uncertain and his legs unsteady. But he had done a great deal for the family, and women can't expect us men to be angels.

Podge was a little too quiet as the wedding drew near. You know, there's no fun in pinning a cockchafer that doesn't spin round lively. The presents came in and the invitations went out, the breakfast was planned, the cake came from London, with heaps of other things; but she kept quiet. The night before the wedding it rained. Somebody wanted her for one of the thousand things people were always wanting her for, and she couldn't be found. She stayed out so long that father sent word to the stablemen and gardeners to take torches and drag the pond. Of course, he was anxious, for you can't have

a wedding without a bride. But why the pond? A thin girl might have tried that without seeming ridiculous, but not a fat one, and Podge couldn't have sunk if she'd tried! She came in at last among us, looking very queer, and wet to the skin, with only a thin cloak on over her evening dress. She said she'd been to the churchyard, to mother's grave, praying that we might be forgiven. She laughed the next moment, catching a glimpse of her own droll figure in the drawing-room glass.

Next day was the wedding day. Everybody had new clothes, and the bridesmaids' lockets had the initials of Podge and the Squire, "C" and "R," in diamonds. Roddy and I had pins to match—Hunt and Roskell's. I forget how many yards of white satin went into Podge's wedding gown, but it measured thirty-eight inches round the waist—no larks. She cried all the way going to church, so that father was nearly washed out of the brougham.

How did the wedding go off? It never came off at all! There were the county people in the smart clothes they'd taken the shine off in London; there were the school children, with washed faces and clean pinafores, and baskets of rose leaves all ready to strew on the path of the happy pair. There were the decorations, palms and lilies, as if the occasion had been a kind of martyr's festival; and there was the Bishop at the altar rails, with the Rector, waiting to tie the knot; and the Squire, in a blue frock coat, buff waistcoat, and shepherd's plaid trousers, with a whole magnolia in his buttonhole, waiting for Podge.

Father tried to lead her up the aisle, but it was too narrow, so he walked behind. Just as she put her foot on the chancel step, out comes old Noel out of the vestry, to everybody's surprise, looking flushed and excited.

He said something I didn't hear, and then Podge calls out, "Oh, I can't! Have mercy!" or something like that, and surged down with a flop, like the sound a big wave makes dashing into a cave's mouth, on the red and white tiles. Old Noel ran to lift her up, but couldn't do it. The Squire called out, "D—— you! Let my wife alone!" And the Bishop rebuked him for swearing in a sacred edifice. Then father and the Squire and old Noel hoisted Podge up—for two of 'em weren't strong enough—and tottered with her into the vestry.

What happened? I got in, and so I know all about it. We sprinkled Podge with water, and set fire to a feather duster and held it under her nose, and she came to, with her hair down, and her wreath and veil hanging by one hairpin. And old Noel bent over her, and said, "Dearest Charlotte, there is no need for the sacrifice now!" And he pulled a newspaper out of his pocket and handed it to father, who said, "What! what! how dare you, man?" and then dropped his eye on a paragraph marked in red ink, and said in the best Parksop manner, "I really beg your pardon, Sir Clement! Your uncle and his son both drowned yachting in the Mediterranean? Most deplorable! but really affords you no excuse for—ah—interrupting a solemn ceremony in so extraordinary a manner." And then he and old—I mean Sir Clement Noel—had a few confidential words in a corner, and I heard old—I mean the Baronet—say, "On my word and honor, a sacred pledge!" And father astounded everybody by turning on the Squire, and telling him in the most gentlemanly way to go about his business, which he did, swearing awfully, while Podge was crying for joy, and Sir Noel comforting her with his arm round her waist—I mean as far as it would go.

That happened three years ago, and Podge and Sir

Clement Noel have been married three years all but a week. We all live with Podge and her husband—I don't think they've ever been alone together for a day since their honeymoon. Father is very fond of Charlotte now, and says the baby is a real Parksop. That always makes Sir Clement Noel wild—I can't think why.

I've often thought since, after seeing what they call a domestic drama, that what happened to Podge and Noel might have happened to the hero and heroine of one. Only, a hero never has gray hair and a stoop, and there never yet was a heroine who measured as much as thirty-eight inches round the waist. It's impossible!

IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION

THE balloon ascended from the Chiswick Gasworks at twelve-thirty, amid the thin cheers of an outer fringe of Works *employés* and an inner circle composed of members of the Imperial Air Club, who had motored down expressly for the start. It was by courtesy a summer day, a June gale having blown itself out over night, a June frost having nipped vegetation over morn. Now there was not a breath of wind, and the sky vault arching over London and the suburbs was of purplish-gray, through which a broad ray of white-hot sunshine pierced slantingly with weird effect as the order "Hands off!" was given, and the *Beata*, of forty-five thousand cubic feet, owner Captain the Honorable H. Maudslay-Berrish, of the I. A. C., soared rapidly upward.

Hitherto Maudslay-Berrish, occupied with the thousand cares devolving on the aeronaut, had not looked directly at either of his traveling companions. These were his wife's friend and his wife. We all remember the sumptuous Miss Fennis, of the Hyperion and other West End comedy theaters. Many of the masculine readers of this truthful record have laid offerings of hot-house flowers, jewelry, sweetmeats, and settlements, at those high-arched insteps in their pre-nuptial days, and not all have had cause to mourn the rejection of the same. But Maudslay-Berrish, son of a philanthropic Nonconformist peer, to whom the theater is the ante-chamber to the Pit, married her, and, as too far south

is north, the men of his set thenceforth tacked on "Poor chap!" or "Poor beggar!" to the mention of his name, when another stage triumph of his gifted wife, who did not resign her profession, was recorded in the newspapers.

The friend of Mrs. Maudslay-Berrish, whom we may know as "Teddy," gasped one or two private gasps as the *Beata* shot up to an altitude of three thousand feet, and Chiswick Gasworks fell away underneath her into a tinted relief map of West London, and then was buried under a sea of swirling dun-gray vapors. The hoot of a motor car—the needle-sharp screech of a railway locomotive—were the last sounds to reach the ears of the *Beata's* three passengers. Then the sounds of Earth sank into the silence of Eternity. And the soul of Mrs. Maudslay-Berrish's friend felt very thin and small, knowing itself adrift upon that tideless sea. The wicker car seemed also small—small to unsafeness—and the ropes as frail as the strands of a spider web. Cautiously Teddy put forth his immaculately gloved hand and touched one. Madness, to have trusted limb and life to things like these. Madness, to have left the good solid ground, where there were clubs and comfort and other men to keep you from feeling alone—for Teddy realized with vivid clearness that in this particular moment and at this particular point Mrs. Maudslay-Berrish counted for nothing. He even forgot to look to see if she was there. But she was there, and looking at him across her husband's back. For Maudslay-Berrish was in the middle of the oblong basket, and he was leaning over, peering down into the swirling gray sea below, his folded arms upon the wicker car edge, his chin upon them.

As matter of fact, he did not wish his wife and her

friend to see how heartily he was laughing. When you have set a trap for two beings whom you hate with an intensity beyond all the range of human expression, and waited patiently for years—it had taken him, Maudslay-Berrish, just three years to qualify as a member of the Air Club—to see them fall into it, you laugh when it happens. And if they chance to see your face while you are doing it, it makes them feel uncomfortable. . . . And when they know! . . . The purple veins swelled upon his narrow forehead under the leather peak of his Club cap. His muscles cracked, his shoulders heaved with that hidden, terrible, convulsive laughter.

“Harwood,” cried his wife, her strong voice ringing loud in the thin, untainted air, “what is the matter? Is anything wrong?”

“The balloon is not leaking, the valve is in proper order, there is plenty of ballast on board, the car is sound, the ropes are new and have been tested,” said Maudslay-Berrish. “There is scarcely a breath of wind to move us, and yet something is wrong. What are you trying to ask me, Beryl . . . whether we are in danger? At the risk of spoiling your evident enjoyment of your first ascent, I answer ‘Yes!’ ”

Then he straightened his bowed figure and turned so as to face the wife who had betrayed him so often, and Teddy, her friend. She, Beryl, looked at him with wild eyes set in a face suddenly grown sharp and thin. She clenched her gloved left hand upon a rope of the car, and the splitting of the glove back revealed her wedding ring and its keeper of sparkling diamonds. At the sight of that consecrated symbol another gust of mad laughter seized Maudslay-Berrish, and the tears poured down his purple face, and he roared and roared again, until every fiber of the car vibrated with his ugly merriment.

"For God's sake, Berrish, don't laugh like that!" shrieked Teddy, blue-white and gibbering. "Are you mad, or what?"

"Were you sane, you infernal fool—you two infernal fools—when you got into this car with the man whom you have outraged?" shrieked Maudslay-Berrish. "Haven't you dragged my good name in the mud, made me a by-word and a laughing-stock, a mockery even to myself—even to myself, in the last five years! Why, you d—— —" (he called Mrs. Maudslay-Berrish an unlovely name) "my very servants sneer at me, the people at the theater grin when I come loafin' round behind the scenes. They're quite aware of what I've swallowed without gaggin'. They know I've lived on your money when I'd got through my own, quite fly as to where most of it came from"—he pointed a shaking finger at the stricken Teddy—"and as downy as you pleased. Teddy, old chap, I've *called* that blue-gilled funkier there, and half a dozen like him. Well, Teddy, old chap, say your prayers quick, for you're going to die suddenly!"

The woman and her lover knew now what their late dupe and butt meant to do. He had the ripping cord half-hitched about his left wrist—the ripping cord, a sharp tug at which will, when a balloon is dangerously dragged during a descent, take an entire panel out of the envelope in two seconds, immediately deflating the bag. And in his right hand Maudslay-Berrish manipulated a neat little revolver.

Certainly he played the star part in the drama, and held the audience breathless. Half of the audience, that is, for Teddy, old chap, was at his prayers. Down on his knees at the bottom of the car, his gloved hands rigidly clasped, his handsome, weak face turned up to the sustaining ball of gas that hovered in its imprisoning net

above, between him and the Illimitable Void, he cowered and slavered. In pleading for Heaven's mercy upon a miserable sinner, he set forth that his Eve had tempted him; he asked for time to make up, another chance, a year, six months, a week only of sweet life. Hearing him, Eve herself grew sick with contempt of his infinite littleness, and even Maudslay-Berrish half turned away his eyes.

"Why don't *you* pray?" he said, sneeringly, to his wife. "Why don't *you* grovel like that thing you have kissed?"

Miss Fennis, of the *Hyperion*, would have held an audience mute and breathless by the quiet scorn conveyed in Mrs. Maudslay-Berrish's look and tone.

"I dare say when you have done what you are going to do, I shall wake up in Hell," she said; "and I believe I shall have earned it!"

Teddy, still spinning out the smeared records of his Past, was now prostrate and bathed in tears.

"If I doubted the existence of such a place before, I do not now. For I have loved that man"—she bit her white under lip sharply—"and I have seen and heard him. Henceforth there can be nothing worse to bear, here or hereafter. Why do you delay? Pull the cord and have done with it, or I shall say *you* are afraid!"

* * * * * * *

The *Beata* came sailing gently down upon a delightful green expanse of turf at Aldershot—the tennis ground, in fact, of a dandy Cavalry Regiment. The anchor dropped and caught in a pollard oak; a dozen delightfully pink lieutenants in correct flannels assisted the handsome Miss Fennis, of the West-End theaters, to alight from the basket. Maudslay-Berrish, calm and imperturbable as usual, followed. In the midst of con-

gratulations and offers of luncheon, a lieutenant exclaimed:

"Great Scott! Why didn't you say you'd another passenger in the car? Here's a man lying in a dead faint at the bottom of it!"

And they brought out Teddy, very white and limp, and gave him brandy.

"Heart weak, what?" said the lieutenant who had exclaimed.

"He has certainly had some—cardiac trouble," returned Maudslay-Berrish placidly; "but I think he will be less liable to the—ahem!—the weakness after this little trip of ours together in the Fourth Dimension."

And he smiled as he lighted a very large cigar.

THE GEWGAW

THE iron doors of the auction room were closed tightly as the valves of an oyster shell; the forward rush of a smartly attired throng awaited their rolling back in the polished steel grooves. It was to be a woman's field day; the contents of a notable jewel casket were to be dispersed under the hammer. And the *bonne-mouche* of the occasion—a superb blue diamond of sixty-five carats, a gem worthy to rank among the historic stones of the world, fit to be counted among the treasures of a Sultan or to blaze upon the bosom of an Empress—was discussed by watering mouths. Some of them were old and some of them were young, but all were tinted with the newest shade in lip bloom, and all wore the same expression of almost sensual desire. Paradise plumes fought together as wonderfully hatted heads bent and swayed and nodded in animated discussion. The stone had brought a hundred thousand louis and the Grand Monarque's own patent of nobility to the Portuguese adventurer who had stolen it from a Hindu temple midway in the seventeenth century. It had gleamed between the wicked, white breasts of the Duchesse de Berry, the shameless daughter of the Régent d'Orleans, at that final supper on the Terrace of Meudon. It had been seized by the Revolutionists in the stormy days of 1792, and had mysteriously vanished from the Garde Meuble, to reappear in the taloned clutches of a London money lender and gem dealer, notorious as a rogue among the spendthrift fine gentlemen

of White's and Crockford's. And it had been bought by a big banker, and bid for by a Tsar, and sold to a great Tory nobleman, and left as an heirloom, and given to an Italian opera singer, and got back by arbitration and made a ward in Chancery, and sold in Paris by sanction of the Court; and now the woman who had bought and owned and worn it—sometimes as the swinging central stone of a tiara, at other times as the pendant to a matchless collar of black pearls—was dead, and Biscoe's famous auction room, which is the chief clearing-place of the world, was about to witness a new record in progressive bidding.

The live women who had known and envied the dead owner of the blue diamond clustered thick about the iron doors, and loaded the atmosphere of the crowded place with their perfumes, and chattered like the inmates of the parrot house at the Zoological Gardens. Not one of them but would have given her soul in exchange for even a lesser jewel if Satan had appeared at her elbow and suggested the exchange. He did come to one of them. She was a pretty woman, still almost young; she was beautifully dressed in painted silken muslin, and wore a whole king bird of Paradise in her Paris hat. The bronze-gold wires of the wonderful tail, tipped with vivid emerald at the ends, curved and sprang about the wearer's well-waved and well-dressed head like living snakes of incredible slenderness. The rich red plumage of the dead creature's head and throat gleamed like rubies; the delicate feather tufts that sprang from beneath the wings quivered with her every movement; the orange bill held a seed, cunningly placed; the cobalt-blue legs were perched upon a rose stem. To insure such beauty in the plumage the skin must be torn from the living bird. Any woman might be happy in possessing

such a hat; but this one was miserable. . . . She wanted the big blue diamond. . . . And this urbane, polished person, elegantly attired, had told her that, if she chose, it might be hers in exchange for a possession only half believed in—to wit, the woman's soul—disposed of to a personage held, until that psychological moment, to be non-existent.

This was not the devil of St. Dunstan, with horns and a tail, or the cloaked and ribald wine seller of St. Anthony, or the lubberly fiend of Luther, or the clawed and scaly tempter of Bunyan. Nor did this personage bear the least resemblance to the swaggering, scarlet-and-black, sinister Mephistopheles of Goethe, as represented by the late Sir Henry Irving—upon whom be the Peace of Heaven!—but the woman entertained no doubt that it was the very devil himself. In this urbane and polished gentleman in the light gray, tight-waisted frock-coat and trousers of Bond Street cut, from beneath whose snowy, polished double collar flowed a voluminous cascade of pearl-colored cravat pinned with a small but perfect pigeon's-blood ruby; whose lapel bore a mauve orchid, whose immaculate white spats, perfectly polished patent boots, slender watch chain, jade-headed walking stick, and pale buff gloves, betokened the most studied refinement and the most elegant taste, the daughter of Eve recognized the hereditary enemy of the Human Race.

She did not scream or turn ghastly with mortal fear; her Crème Magnolia and Rose Ninon were quite too thick for that. But her heart gave a sickening jolt, and fear immeasurable paralyzed her faculties, and her veins ran liquid ice—or was it liquid fire?—and for one swooning instant, under the regard of those intolerably mocking, unspeakably hateful eyes, the life in her

seemed to dwindle to a mere pin's point of consciousness. But she revived and rallied, and the terror passed.

"Come!" he said, "you do not fear me—we have been friends too long; and to me, who know the world so well, and to you, who know it and are of it, there is nothing so undesirable as to create a scene." His voice was polished, gracious. It caressed like the touch of velvet, even if it crisped the nerves as velvet does. "You know me. . . . I know you, and how your heart is set upon this jewel that is to be sold to-day. Rest easy! Though you have with you in that gold chain purse-bag notes for fifteen thousand pounds, ten thousand of it raised by what rigorous moralists . . . those unpleasant persons! . . . might call unlawful means . . ."

"Hush!" she cried, trembling, unable to remove her eyes from that face—long, oval, benevolent—with wide, arched brows and features exquisitely regular, framed in long waving hair—dark auburn mingled with gray—which fell nearly to his collar and mingled with a curling beard of natural growth. She trembled as the thought shot through her that it caricatured a Face that hung, pictured with a Crown of Thorns, above the cot in her child-daughter's nursery; and her thought was mirrored in those intolerable eyes, and the sculpturesque lips smiled in impious mockery.

"Ah, yes! It seems to you I bear some likeness to—shall I say a distant—or an estranged Friend of yours. . . . But I have many other faces, and you have . . . other friends. Do not be afraid, or waste time in denying, the money is only borrowed; you are your young daughter's mother, as well as trustee and executor under her father's will. . . . And, surely, you may borrow the ten thousand pounds at a pinch for an investment? Besides, you will put it back before any unpleasant in-

quiries are made by your fellow-guardian and co-trustee. The manager of the Bank was quite deceived by the second signature upon the deed of withdrawal, so admirably counterfeited, so . . . No, no, I do not wish to alarm you! Be quite at ease upon this matter, really so innocent and easily explained away. But with regard to your project of buying the Blue Diamond—you have no chance of carrying out your plan, not the faintest. Between those sedate persons already assembled by high privilege behind these shut iron doors an understanding has already been arrived at. The Diamond will be put up to public auction and actively bid for, it is true; but the Diamond is already bought and sold.” His tone was of the gentlest sympathy, but the mockery in his glance and the gibing irony of his dreadful smile were to the baffled woman like white-hot irons laid upon a bleeding wound. “Mr. Ulysses Wanklyn, whose great duel with Mr. Cupid Bose at the De Lirecourt sale over that Régence commode of marqueterie thrilled all London, will be the winner of the treasure at ninety-four thousand guineas. Paragraphs in the afternoon papers—most excellent publications I find them, and supremely useful—will refer to the coup as ‘the climax of screeching finance,’ and ‘the hall-mark on an enhanced standard of jewel-values.’ And Messrs. Moreen and Blant, who will retire, ostensibly beaten, from the field after a bid of eighty-eight thousand, will be consoled with by writers who are quite aware that Wanklyn, Bose, Moreen, Blant, and half a dozen others constitute the Blue Diamond Purchasing Syndicate, capital ninety-four thousand guineas.”

The wearer of the king bird of Paradise caught a sharp breath, and bit her sensuous, scarlet-dyed under-lip fiercely. Stung to desperate courage by baffled desire

and the thwarted jewel-lust that had robbed even her child and made of her a forger, she even dared to question. . . .

"If that is so," she said, with angry, dark eyes and a rebelliously-heaving bosom, "why did you whisper to me just now that I could have the Diamond for my own if I gave you . . . as the people do in the old German legends . . . my Soul in exchange for it?"

He smiled, and caressed the strange, orchidaceous flower he wore with perfectly-gloved fingers.

"Have you not heard me called the Father of Lies . . . the Arch-Deceiver?"

Rage intolerable possessed and rent her. She said hoarsely, and in tones unlike her own:

"You can give me the Blue Diamond, and I will have it—at *your price!*"

"You are really a woman of excellent sense," he said—and she was afraid to look because she knew how he was smiling. "Present good for future gain! . . . Doubtless you will recall the quotation, but so uncertain a futurity is well bartered for such a jewel as they have in there. Think—you will snatch it from the great dealers—from the private connoisseurs. You will hold and display and flaunt it in the face of society. You will be beautiful—wearing it! You should be envied, wearing it! You may be happy—doubtless you will be so! And now, just as a mere form, prick your left wrist slightly with this diamond-pointed pencil and inscribe your name upon a leaf of these ebony tablets. First, though, be pleased to remove that . . . ahem! . . . miniature religious symbol from your golden chain. The Crucifix means nothing to you—you do not even remove it when you draw your wedded lover to your embrace—but I am an old-fashioned personage, and my prejudice extends back

over nineteen hundred years—to the reign of Herod Antipas, and is practically unalterable. So . . . thanks! That will serve me excellently!”

From the woman's hand something fell with a golden tinkle to the parqueted floor. A surge of the crowd drove her forward, her French heel crushed what she had dropped. The diamond pencil pricked the white wrist between the buttons of her dainty glove; she withdrew it, a little scarlet bead glistening on the shining point, and hesitated, only an instant, looking at the offered tablets of ebony and gold.

“Come, sign! . . . It will be over in an instant, and, believe me, you will feel far more comfortable afterward!” She remembered that her dentist had employed the same phrases only a day or two before in persuading her to consent to the removal of a decayed incisor. That tooth's successor—a perfect, polished example of human ivory—gleamed as her lips drew back in a nervous laugh provoked by the absurdity of the analogy. She scrawled her signature, and the promise was fulfilled. She was calm—at ease—had no more worrying doubts and silly scruples. He wore no indiscreet expression of proprietorship; his lips did not even smile. And if there was mocking triumph in his eyes, his discreetly dropped lids concealed it. . . . He bowed profoundly as he took the ebony tablets, and then he lifted his gloved left hand and laid a finger on the iron doors. And they rolled apart, revealing the great safe with many patent locks, and the auctioneer at his desk, and the clerk at his; and the chosen already in their seats, and the elaborate preparations for the elaborate farce that was to be played, all ready. A savage rage boiled up in her as she looked at the smug faces of the secret Syndicate, actors well-versed in their separate parts. But the pressure of the

chattering, screaming, perfumed crowd behind her carried her over the threshold, and her companion too. Packed tightly as sardines in the confined space about the rostrum, Society waited the great event. And a bunch of master-keys was produced by the senior partner of Briscoe's, and with much juggling of patent locks the great safe gave up the big, square jewel-case containing the famous collection, and a sibilant "Ss's!" of indrawn breaths greeted the lifting of its lid.

"Do not look at me! Listen—and look at the jewels," whispered the smooth, caressing voice in the ear of the woman who had just signed away her soul in exchange for the sensation of the day. And as a giant commissionaire bearing pearl ropes and tiaras, bracelets and rings and necklaces, nervously paraded up and down the central aisle left for his convenience, and the chattering and screaming of the society cockatoos redoubled, in envious admiration of each swaggering, glittering, covetable gewgaw, the devil told the woman very plainly how the thing was to be done.

"The stone that I shall give you is an exact replica in a newly-invented paste of the stone that is the price of what I have bought from you. When the commissionaire brings round the Blue Diamond, touch the jewel boldly—take it in your hand, as it is permissible to do—and substitute the paste. Have no fear! I will undertake that the act is undetected. Thenceforth wear your prize undismayed; boast of it as you will. The one—the only—drawback to your perfect happiness must be that society will believe your jewel to be false, while you have the exquisite joy of knowing it to be genuine. So take *this*, and act as I have counseled. Two hours to wait before you can dare to escape with it, for the Blue Diamond will be the last lot of the day. But what are

two hours, even spent in a vitiated atmosphere; with such a prize your own, hidden in your glove or in your hand? A mere nothing! And here comes the commissioner with the Diamond. . . . Only an alumina in hexagonal arrangement crystallized in the cooling of this planet you call 'the World' as arrogantly as though there were no others, and yet how unique, how exquisite! See how the violet rays leap from the facets, even the noblest sapphire looks cold and pale beside the glorious gem. Murder has been committed for its shining sake over and over again in ages of which your history has no cognizance. It has purchased the faith of Emperors and the oaths of Kings. Rivers of blood have flowed because of it. Peerless women have laid down their honor to gain it. And it will be yours . . . yours! Quick, the commissioner is coming. School your hand to steadiness; no need to hide your lust, for all faces wear the same look here. Only be quick, and have no fear!"

The eyes of the commissioner were fastened upon the woman's white, ringed, well-manicured hand, as in its turn it lifted the Blue Diamond—slightly set in platinum as a pendant—from its pale green velvet bed. But yet she effected the exchange. The substituted paste jewel was borne on—the paroquets and cockatoos chattered and screamed as loudly over the false stone as they had over the real, which lay snugly hidden in the thief's fair bosom. The syndicate of dealers played out their farce to its end, and Mr. Ulysses Wanklyn, to the infinite chagrin of Mr. Cupid Bose, and the gnashing discomfiture of Messrs. Moreen and Blant, secured the paste diamond at ninety-four thousand pounds. And amidst cries and congratulations the day ended. And the woman, with her price in her bosom, escaped into the open air, and signaled to the chauffeur waiting with her

motor-brougham and drove home. Fear and triumph filled her. When would the theft be discovered? How soon would voices in the streets begin to clamor of the stolen gem? How should she who had stolen it ever dare to wear or to vaunt it, with Scotland Yard—with the detective eyes of all the world upon her? She had been befooled, duped, defrauded; she moaned as she bit her lace handkerchief through. . . . She reached her dainty boudoir just in time to have hysterics behind its locked and bolted doors. And when she had quieted herself with ether and red lavender, she drew the Blue Diamond from its hiding-place, and it gleamed in her palm with a diabolical splendor, as though the stone were sentient, and knew what it had cost. Could the great dealers be deceived—a probability quite impossible—she would be at liberty to wear this joy, this glory, to see its myriad splendors reflected in envious eyes. She kissed it as she had never kissed her child or any of her lovers—with passion, until its sharp facets cut her lips. And, as she kissed it, her quick ears were alert to catch the shoutings of the newsmen in the streets. But there were none. She dined in her boudoir, and slept, with the aid of veronal; and in the morning's newspaper there was not a wail, not a word! She gave the king-bird of Paradise hat to her maid—she was so pleased, so thankful! The afternoon papers, and those of the next day and the next, were dumb upon the subject of the daring theft of the big Blue Diamond from Briscoe's famous auction-room. She grew more and more secure. And one never-to-be-forgotten night she put on a Paquin gown and went to a great reception at a ducal house with the Blue Diamond as pendant to her pearl-and-brilliant collar. She counted on the cockatoos screeching, but they did not screech. The eyes that dwelt on the

Blue Diamond were astonished, surprised, covertly amused, contemptuous.

"That is for luck, I suppose, dear?" cooed one of her intimate friends. "I mean that large blue crystal you are wearing. . . . I bought some last winter at a jeweler's in the bazaar at Rangoon—they find them with moonstones and olivines and those other things in the *débris* at the Ruby Mines, I understood. I must have mine mounted. By the way, do you know that——" (she mentioned the name of a great financier of cosmopolitan habits and international fame) "has bought the Blue Diamond from Ulysses Wanklyn for a hundred and ten thousand pounds: *She*"—her voice dropped a little as she referred to a lady upon whom the great financier was reputed to have bestowed his plutocratic affections—"will be here to-night. Probably she will wear it! They say she was absolutely determined on his getting it for her, and so . . . *À porte basse, passant courbé*, especially when the circumstances are pretty. *What* do you say? You heard it had been discovered by the dealers that the Blue Diamond had been found to be false . . . a paste imitation, or a cut crystal like that thing you are wearing? Oh, my dear, how quite too frightfully absurd a *canard*! As though Ulysses Wanklyn and Cupid Bose and Blant, and all the other connoisseurs, could be deceived! What a very remarkable-looking man that is who is bowing to you! . . . The graceful person with the Apostolic profile and the beautiful silky beard"—and the intimate friend gave a little shudder. "And the extraordinary eyes that give one a crispation of the nerves? . . ."

It was he—her Purchaser—moving suddenly toward her through the throng of naked backs and bare bosoms.

"I hope," he said, and bowed and smiled, "that you

are satisfied with the result of our . . . negotiations the other day?" Then, as the fashionable crowd parted and the Great Financier walked through the rooms, his imperious mistress upon his arm, her husband looking amiable behind them, he added, indicating the swinging central pendant of the lady's superb diamond tiara, with a wave of a slender white-gloved hand, "My substitute was convincing, you think; you suppose it has deceived even the experts? Not in the least—the substitution of the paste stone for the Blue Diamond was discovered as soon as the public had quitted the auction-room. But Messrs. Wanklyn and Bose and my other very good friends who lay down the law in jewels as in other things, to Society, agreed not to lose by the fraud. The paste has the *cachet* of their approval, and has been sold for a great sum. 'What water!' the world is crying. 'What luster!' 'How superb a gem!' While you, my poor friend, who display upon your bosom the real stone, have merely been credited with a meretricious taste for wearing Palais Royal jewelry. Pardon! I have not deceived you—or not in the way you imagine. . . . I said the Blue Diamond should be yours. . . . It is! I said you should be envied; you should, certainly. It is a thousand pities you are only sneered at. I said you might be happy. . . . It is most regrettable that you do not find the happiness you looked for. *Au revoir*, dear lady, *au revoir!*"

She felt indisposed, and went home. . . .

THE NIGHT OF POWER

IN TWO PARTS

I

THE Doctor, stepping softly forth from the sick-room, paused for a brief confidential parley with the print-gowned, white-capped hospital nurse, who had followed him. That functionary, gliding from his side, vanished, with the falling of a curtain-sheet soaked in disinfectant and the closing of a door, into the Blue-Beard chamber beyond, leaving the man of medicine free to pursue his portly way downstairs.

At the bottom of the second flight one of the hotel servants stopped him with a respectful murmur and a salver with a card upon it; and the Doctor, reading the name thereon by the help of a pair of gold-rimmed glasses, inclined his neatly-shaved, gray-blue chin toward the mourning diamond discreetly twinkling amid the billows of black satin that rolled into the bosom of his capacious waistcoat, saying:

"The wife of my patient upstairs? Certainly; I will see the lady at once. Which way?"

His responsible, square-toed, patent-leather boots had not much farther to carry him. The lady and her maid were waiting in a sitting-room upon the next landing. Under the fashionable physician's heavy yellow eyelids—livery eyelids, if one might dare to hint so—lay the

faculty of keen observation. He noticed, in the moment of recovery from a justly-celebrated bow, that the maid was in tears, and the mistress was not.

He presupposed that he had the pleasure of addressing Mrs. Rosval. Mrs. Rosval answered that he had. Then the maid uttered a sob like the popping of a soda-water cork, and Mrs. Rosval said:

“Matilda, be quiet!”

She was a woman of supple figure and of medium height. She appeared to be elegantly dressed, though no one garment that she wore asserted itself as having been expensive. The eyes that looked at the Doctor through her thick black veil struck him as being unnaturally brilliant. This fact, together with the composure of her voice and manner, confirmed him in the belief that the woman was in a highly-strung condition of emotional excitement. He was mentally evolving a little prescription—with bromide in it, to be taken every three hours—when she lifted her hands and unpinned the veil. Then the Doctor looked in the face of a woman who was as perfectly calm, cool, and composed as he was himself. Even more so because the revelation rather surprised him.

She addressed him in clear, quiet tones:

“A telegraphic message was delivered to me this morning——”

“At Mirkwood Park, near Bradford,” the Doctor unconsciously quoted aloud from the card he still held between his plump white thumb and forefinger.

“It purported to come from the proprietor of this hotel. It said that Mr.—that my husband was dangerously ill—that my presence was urgently needed.” Mrs. Rosval’s lips—delicately chiseled lips, but totally devoid of color—shaped themselves into something that might

have been a smile. And as the maid, who nursed a dressing-bag in the background, at this juncture emitted a sniff, the mistress glanced again over her shoulder, and said, with a slight accent of weariness or contempt, or both together: "Really, Matilda, there is no need for that!"

The irrefragable Doctor had gauged the shallow depths of the woman's nature by this time. She was merely a polished and singularly adamant specimen of the unfeeling wife. He allowed a tinge of rebuke to color the tone of his explanation.

"The proprietor acted upon my—ah—advice. The condition of my patient may be truthfully described as—er—dangerous. The illness is—in fact—typhoid fever. And your husband has it in a bad form. There are complications which——"

The Doctor stopped short. For Mrs. Rosval was not listening. She was crumpling a piece of pinkish paper into a ball—probably the telegram to which she had alluded—and pondering. Then she leveled those strangely brilliant, narrow-lidded eyes of hers pointblank at the Doctor, and asked: "Am I to understand that Mr. Rosval has nothing to do with—my being sent for?"

The Doctor conveyed the information that Mr. Rosval had not prompted the step. Mr. Rosval had been—since the third day following on the—ah—development of the illness—ringing the changes between delirium and—ah—coma. For—as the Doctor had already said—there were complications——

Mrs. Rosval neatly stopped the ball, for the second time.

"How did you know, if *he* did not tell you, that there was a Mrs. Rosval? How did you get at my address?"

The Doctor, swelling with the indignity of being sup-

posed to have got at anybody's address, explained that the proprietor of the hotel, having some faint inkling that Mr. Rosval belonged to the class of landed gentleman, had looked up the name in *Burke*.

The sharp suspicion faded out of Mrs. Rosval's eyes as she listened. It was a perfectly credible, perfectly simple explanation. She tossed the crumpled telegram into the fire—which devoured it at a gulp—and began to pull off her gloves. That was her way of intimating that she accepted the situation. Then she rang the bell. The decorous waiter appeared, and she gave the man a quiet order, handing him some loose silver and a slip of paper, upon which she had penciled a few words.

"A cab is waiting at the door. Pay the driver and send him away. A person who is—not quite a gentleman—is waiting in the vestibule. Say to him that Mrs. Rosval is satisfied, and there is no need to wait. Give him that paper at the same moment, or he will not believe you!" As the waiter vanished she turned to the Doctor with the faintest flicker of a smile upon her sensitive pale lips. "I thought it wisest to keep the cab, in case I required to leave this place hurriedly," said Mrs. Rosval. "The man waiting downstairs is a detective from a well-known Agency. I judged it best to enlist his services—he would have proved useful supposing this business of the telegram to have been a Trap."

The Doctor spread his large white hands, dangleingly, like a seal's flappers.

"A trap?" he repeated, helplessly. "My dear madam! You suspected that some designing person or persons unknown might—possibly use your husband's name, invent a story of his illness as a ruse to—entrap you?"

"I suspected," returned Mrs. Rosval, "no unknown person. The inventor of the ruse would have been my

husband. We separated some years ago by mutual consent. At least, I refused to live with him any longer, and he—knowing what grounds I had for the refusal—was obliged to submit. But he resented my action in the matter.” Mrs. Rosval raised her delicate dark eyebrows with weary disdain, and imparted to her shoulders a mute eloquence of contempt which is not the prerogative of an English-bred woman. “And he has, more than once, had recourse to what, for want of a better word, I call Traps. That is all. Matilda,” she addressed the tearful maid, “dry your eyes and tell the people downstairs that I engage this suite of rooms. Two bedrooms, a bathroom, and sitting-room at ten guineas a week, I think they said? Horribly expensive, but it cannot be helped. And now, Doctor”—she turned again to the Doctor—“when do you wish me to see your patient? At once? It shall be at once if you say so! I am completely in your hands!”

The Doctor, a little staggered by the deftness of his patient’s wife in transferring the onus of the situation from her shoulders to his own, absolutely prohibited any suggestion of her entering the sick-room until refreshed and rested. Mrs. Rosval acquiesced, with a repetition of that compromising statement about being completely in his hands—and the Doctor took his leave, promising to return later that evening. She gave him her cool fingers, and they parted. He had no sooner reached the door than she called him back.

“I only wanted to ask—— Of course, you have a library. Does the catalogue of your library include a file of the *Daily Telegraph*?” It did, the Doctor admitted. File in question extending some twelve years back.

“Three will do,” said Mrs. Rosval, warming one slen-

der arched foot upon the fender. "Next time you are in want of a little light reading, look in the Law Intelligence, Divorce Division, month of February, 1899, where you will find a case: 'Ffrench v. Ffrench; Rosval cited.' The details will explain a good deal that may appear puzzling to you with regard to the strained relations between Mr. Rosval and myself. Though doctors never allow themselves to be puzzled, do they? *Au revoir!*"

II

The Doctor had had an unusually busy day of it. But he curtailed his after-dinner nap in order to glance through the Law Intelligence records of the month of February, 1899. There was much in the case to which Mrs. Rosval had referred that went far toward justifying the "strained relations" she had hinted at. And it is the duty of the medical profession to rally at the war-cry of the outraged Proprieties. But, when alone and unobserved, doctors have many points in common with mere men. And as this Doctor stepped into his brougham he said, "Women are very hard! In all human probability the man was innocent." He said again, "Women are hard!" as he creaked up the hotel staircase.

He found her in the sick-room. She had changed her dress for something that gave out no assertive silken rustle in answer to her movements, something that draped the charming contour of her figure—she had a charming figure—with soft, quiet folds, like the wings of a dun hawkmoth. That fell composure still walled her in as with ramparts of steel. She held the bed-curtain back as the Doctor stooped over the livid, discolored face upon the pillow. She took a linen cloth from the nurse, and

deftly, lightly wiped away the froth and mucus that had gathered about the cracked and bleeding lips. But the hand that rendered these offices was as steady as though it had been carved out of white marble.

Disturbed from his lethargy by the invasion of candle-light upon his haggard eyelids and the Doctor's bass murmur in his ear, the sick man began to talk a little. For the most part it was mere gabble, but some sentences were plain. He moaned piteously for a barber, because he was unshaven. Rosval had always been foolishly vain of his personal appearance. And he damned the one glass of bad water, to the imbibition of which he attributed his disease, promising, if he got well, never to drink any more. To do him credit, he had never been addicted to that particular form of liquid refreshment. The Doctor inferred as much from his diagnosis—and from the faint sarcastic quiver of Mrs. Rosval's white lips. Then the tongue of the man ceased wagging—but the burning head began to thresh to and fro upon the pillow, and the claw-like hands to scratch at the bed-clothes in a fresh access of the maddening enteric irritation. Alleviating measures proved as effective as alleviating measures generally do prove; the head went on rolling, and the crooked talons continued to tear. All at once they were quiet. Mrs. Rosval had laid her hand upon the clammy forehead—about as tenderly, to all appearance, as she would have laid it upon the back of a chair. And the man was still. She placed the other hand beside the first—the drawn lines about the nostrils relaxed, the clenched teeth parted, the breast rose and fell with the indrawing and outgoing of a sigh of relief. And the man slept. So soundly that she moved from him presently, without disturbing him, and passed into

the room adjoining, where the Doctor and the nurse were holding a whispered confabulation.

There would be no need to send in another professional attendant, the nurse said, now that the patient's wife had arrived. She possessed a remarkable ability for nursing, and extraordinary self-command. She shrank from nothing—not even the most repugnant duties of the sick-chamber. The nurse had met in her time with ladies who took things coolly; but this lady really surprised her.

The Doctor was in the act of shaking his head—not from side to side, but up and down—a gesture which expressed indulgent tolerance of the nurse's surprise while it repudiated the notion of his entertaining any on his own account—when he jumped. For a calm, quiet voice at his elbow said:

“You told me that Mr. Rosval was dangerously ill. Is he dying?”

The nurse had vanished into the carbolic-laden atmosphere of the Chamber of Horrors.

“My dear madam, your husband is in the Hands——” So the Doctor was beginning, when the obvious inappropriateness of the stereotyped formula stopped him short. Then he admitted that the condition of the man in the other room was very precarious. That he could not, when not *in articulo mortis*, be said to be dying—but that, toward the small hours of the morning, he might attain to a pitch of prostration closely allied to that condition. And that nothing could be done for him but to give him milk and medicine regularly, and—— The Doctor would have ended “and trust in Providence,” but for obvious reasons he thought better of it. Then he went away, feeling quite certain in his own mind that

Mrs. Rosval would be a widow before twenty-four hours were over.

That lady, meanwhile, returning to the sick-room, had persuaded the fagged nurse to go and lie down. She understood how to do all that was necessary, she whispered, and would call the attendant if any change occurred. Then she sat down at the foot of the bed, and prepared to keep her vigil with unshaken fortitude. The sleeping woman in the next room breathed heavily, the sounds of rolling wheels and jarring voices grew less and less—then all fell quiet. About three hours before the dawn the sleeper awakened. The hollow eyes no longer turned on her with the blind, glassy stare of delirium. There was reason in Rosval's look, and memory.

He seemed to beckon, and she came near. She had to stoop to catch the moaning whisper that asked: "How—did you—come here?"

She answered steadily, "They sent for me."

"They'd not have—if *I* had known!" Rosval gasped.

"If I annoy you," said Mrs. Rosval, with icy tolerance, "I can go!" She turned, meaning to call the nurse; but a claw-like hand went weakly out and caught at her skirts. The grasp was no stronger than that of a newborn child, but, just for that it *was* so feeble, it held her.

"You'll not go! Three years—you've treated me—like a leper! Never would—listen to what I'd got to say. But now . . . I—tell you, she—sat on—my knee and—kissed me! Before I knew it—and then—the husband came in! A plant, by Gad!"

Mrs. Rosval said, "You must not talk. The Doctor says you are not to talk," and busied herself with the bottles and glasses that occupied a little stand near the bedside.

Rosval condemned the Doctor. Mrs. Rosval measured

out his medicine, raised his head with professional skill, and offered him the glass. He clenched his teeth, and defied her with gaunt eyes across the brim.

"No! No milk—no doctor's stuff. I've been going to the devil—for three years past," proclaimed the sinner, feebly. "Why not go—at once—and have done with it?" Then he fell back heavily on the pillow.

Mrs. Rosval summoned the nurse. The nurse could do nothing. For the moribund was obdurate, and every fresh manifestation of obduracy drove not one, but half a gross of nails into his coffin. That casket was fast progressing toward completion, when Mrs. Rosval conceived a desperate idea. The execution of it cost her a severe struggle. Stooping down, she whispered to the sinking man:

"Jack!"

His faded eyes rolled in their sunken sockets until they rested on her. He said with difficulty:

"Well?"

"What will make you take it?"

Something like a gleam of cunning came into the face. The answer came:

"Kiss me!"

She battled with herself for a moment silently, and then, bending closer, touched his forehead with her lips.

"That isn't all! You must say: '*I forgive you!*'"

"I can't!"

"All—right, then!"

Silence ensued. The angles of the features were growing pinched and sharp; a bluish shade was creeping about the mouth. She cast a glance of scorn at her own reflection, caught in a mirror that hung against the opposite wall, and said the words:

"I forgive you! Isn't that enough?"

"Not quite. '*I love you—and——*' "

The voice was getting very faint.

"I love you—dear—and——"

"And '*I take you back!*' "

"I take you back." Her iron fortitude was broken. She said it with a sob, and gathered the weak head to her bosom, being the kind of woman who does not do things by halves.

* * * * *

A month later the Doctor received a check. It was a handsome check, enclosed with the thanks and compliments of Mr. and Mrs. Rosval, on leaving London.

"Carried him off with her into the country," said the Doctor, tapping his teeth with a paper-knife as he closed the volume of the *Daily Telegraph* which contained the case "*Ffrench v. Ffrench*; Rosval cited." "In other words, taken him back. And in all human probability the man was guilty. Women are very weak!"

THE MAN WHO COULD MANAGE WOMEN

OR thought he could. Which comes to the same thing. His name was Yethill, and he was a Junior Captain in the R. A.

Yethill belonged to the New School; he was a specimen of the latest military development of the age. By their smoked spectacles shall ye know Yethill and his peers; by the right foot, which is broadened by the lathe; by the right thumb, which is yellowed with acids and sticky with collodion; by the hard-bitten, pragmatical, theoretical, didactic way of treating all mysteries in heaven—a locality which is interesting only in virtue of the opportunities afforded to trick aviators—and earth, in which mines may be dug, and upon which experiments may be carried on. These men wake themselves in the morning, and heat their shaving water by means of electrical machines of their own invention. They carry kodaks in their bosoms, and are, in the matter of imparting information, human volcanoes continually in eruption.

Yethill was not behind his fellows in this respect. When he had said his little say upon the Theory of Wireless Photophony, the Detection of Subterranean Mines by the K Rays, and the irresponsibility of the bedbug in connection with beri-beri; when he had told the Head of the Electrical Department how many watts are equivalent to a horse-power, and explained to the Colonel, who is sinfully proud of his men, that the employment

of the uneducated inferior in warfare will cease with the century, and that the army of the future will consist entirely of officers, he would drop his voice to a confidential whisper and control his elbows. He talked heliographically as a rule, and if a man were left to listen to him—he could, as a rule, clear the Mess smoking-room in ten minutes from the start—he would dilate at length upon his best-loved hobby, the art of managing women.

Yethill was no Adonis. He had a knobby, argumentative head, a harlequin set of features, each separate one belonging to a different order and period of facial architecture; and a figure which was not calculated, as his tailor observed with bitterness, to do justice to a good cut. But it was wonderful to hear him talk in that conquering, masterful way of his. He had an appalling array of statistics to prove that the majority of marriages were miserable; that life, connubially speaking, was dust and ashes in the mouths of nineteen Benedicts out of twenty. But the darkest hour presaged the dawn. Let the man about to marry, let the already-married, but adopt the Yethill system of sweetheart-and-wife breaking, and thenceforth all would be well. And thousands of voices arising from the uttermost ends of the civilized earth would hail with one accord Yethill as their deliverer.

Then came an essay on the New Art of Courtship.

“To a man,” Yethill would say, jerking his knee and stammering a little, as his custom was when excited, “who is a reasonable being, the woman he loves is a woman—only spelt with a big ‘W’; the woman he likes is a woman spelt in the ordinary way; and the woman he doesn’t like is a mere creature of the female sex. To a woman,” Yethill would continue, “who is, nineteen

times out of twenty, a perfectly unreasonable being;—the man she loves is a demi-god; the man she doesn't love is a man;—and the man she dislikes is a gorilla. She quite overlooks the fact that in every individual human male these three may be found united. And man is weak enough to humor her. So that out of so many marriages that take place, a majority—a frightful majority—are founded upon illusions. And the subsequent state of conjugality may be called a state of evolution, in which these primary illusions, after undergoing a process of disarrangement and disintegration, are finally reduced to impalpable powder, and the Bed Rock of Reality is laid bare. We know what happens after that!"

The listening man generally knew enough to grunt an affirmative. And Yethill would, with many weird facial jerks and twitches, go on to explain the system.

The great system was, like all other wonderful discoveries, involved in a very simple plan of procedure. It consisted only in reversing the accepted order of things. A man, supposedly desirous of getting married, recognizing in himself the existence of the trinity above mentioned, should assert the existence of the third person from the very outset—suppress the demi-god, show the gorilla. Let the woman you were about to make your wife see the worst of you before you showed her the best. Let her pass through the burning fiery furnace before you admitted her into the Paradise that is the reward of proved devotion. Let her know what bullying meant before you took to petting—blame her weaknesses before you praised her virtues. Under this *régime* there would be no illusions to commence with; and married life, instead of being full of disappointments, would be replete with delightful surprises. Your wife married you, believing you to be a gorilla.

"There's the weak point," the listener would interpolate. "What woman, unless a lunatic of sorts, *would* marry a gorilla?"

Yethill would not hear of this objection. He was always deaf when you came to it. He would pound on—dilate on the surprise and joy with which she found that she had married a man, and the rapture with which she would greet the final discovery that she had got hold of a demi-god.

"It sounds splendid," the other men would say, "but it won't wash. Look here, I'm going to take Miss So-and-So up to a Gaiety *matinée* to-morrow. To follow up your system I ought to call for her in my worst clothes, be surly on the way to the station, and neglectful in the tunnels. I ought to dump her into her stall like a sack, go out to 'see a man' between every act, and take it for granted that she doesn't want cool tea and warm ices. You know that'd never do! She'd give me the bag to-morrow. And she'd be right!"

But Yethill hearkened not. There was excitement at the Arsenal, and much babbling in barracks, the day on which it was publicly made known that Yethill contemplated giving an object-lesson in support of his great system very shortly.

The object was Miss Sallis.

Miss Sallis was a fluffy little pink-and-white girl, the daughter of a retired Admiral, who lived near the Dock-yard.

Men had dined with Miss Sallis, and played tennis with Miss Sallis, and flirted with Miss Sallis, during several seasons past. Some of them had asked for her hand—she wore fives in gloves—and had not got it. Thus, Yethill's announcement was received with a certain degree of risibility. No bets were made upon the

chances of Yethill's getting her, the odds against his acceptance were too tremendous. Yethill proposed. He mentioned that his prospects of advancement in the Service were not very promising; that his scientific pursuits would have to be relinquished if he were to set up an establishment on even a moderate scale, and that he did not intend to relinquish those pursuits; that there were several hereditary diseases in his family; that, while bestowing upon the lady he honored with the offer of his hand a regard which justified his proposal, he should not have made that proposal had the lady been poor—with other statements of equal candor. A more wonderful proposal was never made.

What was more wonderful still, Miss Sallis accepted him! He bought her a ring, containing three small fragments of petrified red-currant jelly, embedded in fifteen-carat gold; and when she asked him to put it on her finger said, "Oh, rot!" and wouldn't. He spent a certain amount of time with his betrothed, but invariably carried a scientific work in his pocket, wherein he might openly take refuge when the primrose paths of love proved wearisome. He forbade her to dance with other men, and did not dance with her himself. He snubbed her when she asked questions about his camera, his lathe, his batteries, and tried timidly to be interested in magnets and inductors, acids and cells, because they interested *him*. He carried out his system thoroughly. If Miss Sallis *had* any illusions about Yethill he bowled the poor little thing over, right and left, like ninepins, long before the wedding-day.

With the loss of her illusions went some of her good looks. She made a pretty-looking little bride. With her fluffy pale hair, her pink nose, and her pink eyelids, a not remote resemblance to an Angora kitten was traced

in her. She was married in a traveling-gown, without any bridesmaids; and after the wedding-breakfast Captain and Mrs. Yethill drove home to their lodgings on the Common. The wedding-trip had been abandoned—from no lack of money, but because Yethill said he had had enough of traveling, and the custom of carrying a bride away, as if in triumph, to the accompaniment of rice and slippers, was “guff.” He certainly played the gorilla as if to the manner born. The poor little woman loved him; he loved her. But as his skull was made of seven-inch armor-plate, he went on knocking it against his system. He had got used to the gorilla-business, and couldn’t leave it off. Yet, out of his wife’s sight and hearing, he was a doting husband. The Duke in the *Story of Patient Griseldis* must have been a man of Yethill’s stamp.

Mrs. Yethill, as time went on, began to be a walking manifestation of the effects of the system. She lost her gaiety and her pink cheeks; her smile became nervous and her dress dowdy. The little vanities, the little weaknesses, the little affectations, which had helped to make Miss Sallis charming, had been bullied out of Mrs. Yethill’s character until it was as destitute of any blade of verdure as a skating-rink. She had proved herself the most patient, loving, tolerant of wives; but Yethill went on trying her. She stood the trials, and he invented new tests—exactly as if she had been a Government bayonet or a regulation sword-blade. A bright man Yethill!

They were called upon, and returned visits, at intervals. A taste for society was one of the tendencies which were to be chastened. Female friends were prohibited, as being likely to sow the seed of incipient rebellion against the system.

“I don’t care, Tom, if I have you!” said Mrs. Yethill,

patting her gorilla, who, mindful of his own tenets, was careful not to exhibit any appreciation of her attention. But he made up for it by boasting that evening in the smoking-room, until those who hearkened with difficulty prevented themselves from braining him with legs of chairs. Their wives would have commended them for the deed. Yethill had not many admirers about this period.

But he went on blindly. Can one ever forget how he crowed over having cured Mrs. Yethill of a tendency toward jealousy, of the vague and indiscriminating kind? The prescription consisted in posting to himself letters highly scented and addressed in a variety of feminine scrawls. Yethill was good at imitating handwriting!—and he absented himself from the domestic hearth for several days together whenever there was a recurrence of the symptoms. The method wrought a wonderful cure; but Mrs. Yethill began to grow elderly from about this period. You could hardly have called her a young woman, when the baby came, and brought his mother's lost youth back to her, clenched in one pudgy hand. The vanished roses fluttered back and perched upon her thin cheekbones again. She was heard to laugh. Her husband, who secretly adored her, and who had continued to stick to the system more from a desire for *her* glorification than his own, feared a retrogression. So he thought out a new torture or two, and put them into active application. He sneered at the puerilities of nursery talk. He downcried the beauty and attainments of the baby when she praised them. He pooh-poohed her motherly fears, when the ailments inseparable from the joyous period of infancy overtook his heir. This was the last straw laid upon Mrs. Yethill's aching shoulders. The downfall of the great system followed.

In this way. His wife came into his workshop one morning. The workshop was forbidden ground, and Yethill dropped the negative he was developing, and turned to stare. He saw that she was very pale, and that her lips were bitten in. He heard her say that there was something the matter with baby, and she wanted the doctor.

Solely in the interests of his wife whom he esteemed above all living women, Yethill refused to allow the doctor to be sent for. The child was as right as a trivet. Women were always worrying. She was to get away with her nonsense, and leave him in peace. With more to the same effect. She drooped her head, and went away obediently, only to return in half an hour, with another version of the same prayer upon her lips. Would he—would he come and look for himself? Yethill was thoroughly annoyed. Yethill refused. Yethill went on, stubbornly, dabbling with his negatives, until right from overhead—baby's nursery was above the workshop—Yethill had never heard a woman scream like that before. . . . Something like an ice-bolt shot down his spine. He dashed up to the nursery, and looked in. The sight he saw there sent him tearing across the Common, a hatless, coatless man, to the Doctor's house.

When the Doctor came he said he could be of no use; he ought to have been called in an hour ago. And Yethill, hearing this fiat, and meeting his wife's eyes across the table, felt the system totter to its foundations.

He found himself wondering at her for taking baby's end so quietly; but he had schooled her to endure silently. There were no tears—he had always jeered at tears. The Doctor took him aside before he left.

“You must treat your wife with kindness—and con-

sideration, Yethill," said the Doctor, "or I won't answer for the consequences!"

As if Yethill needed to be told to be kind or considerate! As if Yethill had never loved—did not love—the late Miss Sallis! He planned a revelation for her without delay. He would take her in his arms; kiss her, and tell her that her time of trial was overpast; give her her meed of praise for her heroism, her meed of sympathy for her grief—and his. And he would own that he had made a mistake in the matter of baby deceased. And she would forgive—as she always had forgiven.

As he decided this, she came into the room. She was quite composed. She carried something behind her. She spoke to him very quietly in a dull, strange, level voice—so strange a voice that, just as he was about to open his arms and say, "Annie!" in the voice he had been saving up for the Day of Revelation, the gesture and the word wouldn't come.

"Tom," said Mrs. Yethill, "what should you say if I told you that I had made up my mind to kill myself?"

She brought her hand from behind her; it held one of Yethill's revolvers. She had been very much afraid of these lethal instruments in the early days of her marriage, but under the system had learned to clean them, and even drew the cartridges. But the thing she held wasn't loaded, Yethill was quite sure of that. It sealed up the fountain of his admiring tenderness to have her treat him to commonplace, vulgar heroics. It put her out of drawing, and Yethill out of temper.

She asked again:

"What would you say if I told you I mean to kill myself?"

Yethill ran his armor-plated head against the last wall. He answered brutally:

"I should tell you, if you were such a fool as to threaten such a thing, to do it, and have done with it!"

She said, "Very well!"—and did it.

* * * * *

When people came running in, they found something—perhaps it was the system—scattered on the walls, on the floor, everywhere. And Yethill was howling, and beating his seven-inch skull against heavy pieces of furniture, and calling on Annie to come back. But she had escaped, and was in no hurry; and he hadn't the pluck to follow her out of the world and apologize.

"Was she mad?" somebody asked the Doctor; and the Doctor said:

"No; but she might have become so if she had lived much longer with a lunatic!"

"You mean——?"

"I mean," said the Doctor, "that Yethill has been suffering from dementia for years. I mean that he will see the inside of a Lunatic Asylum in six months from date."

But the Doctor was wrong. He did—in three!

OBSESSED

ANDREW FENN is known to the world as an art critic and essayist of unerring instinct and exquisite refinement, a writer of charming *vers de société*, and teller of tales supposedly designed for children, but in reality more appreciated by children of a larger growth. He is much sought after, but little to be found, unless one has the *entrée* to his pleasant, roomy old house in Church Street, Chelsea, where he lives in the midst of his library—the whole house is a library—his etchings and Japanese curios. He is less of a traveler than he used to be; getting old, he says, and lazy, content with old friends, soothed by old pipes, fortified by old wine—he has a supreme *goût* in wines—and nourished by excellent cookery.

His household staff consists but of an elderly valet and butler, and a housekeeper-cook. She has been in her master's service twenty years, and is beginning to grow handsome, Andrew is wont to say. Certainly, if her master speaks the truth, she must have been, when comparatively young, extraordinarily unlovely, this most excellent of women. Even now she infallibly reminds the casual beholder of an antique ecclesiastical gargoye much worn by weather. Her name is Ladds. She has never been married, but respect for the position of authority she occupies in Andrew's household universally accords her brevet rank. She might have occupied another, and more important position, if——

“Yes,” Andrew says, when he is disposed to tell the

story—and he often does tell it to intimate friends, leaning back on the library divan, after a cosy dinner, holding his gray beard in one big fist, still brown with tropical sunshine—"Ladds is an excellent creature. She might have married me, might Ladds!"

We invariably chorus astonishment. Then some of Ladds' famous coffee comes in, and Andrew gets up to hunt for precious liquors, and, having found them, continues:

"I came *very* near marrying her—once."

Somebody growls: "Good job you pulled up in time!"

Andrew rounds on the somebody. "I didn't pull up. *She* did. Refused me!"

There is a general howl.

"I am telling you men the truth," Andrew says, pulling the gray beard. "Fifteen years ago I was infatuated with that woman. She possessed my every thought; she dominated me, like——"

"Like a nightmare!"

"Apposite illustration," says Andrew, nodding. "*Like* a nightmare. It was just about the time I published my book, *Studies of the Human Grotesque in Art, Ancient and Modern*. You remember, some of you, I was keen on the subject—had been for years. And I was a traveler and collector in those days: I'd got together a wonderful show of illustrative subjects. You won't see many of 'em now. I gave them to the Smoketown Mechanical Institute afterward."

He pulls at his long cherrystick, and blows a cloud of Latakia, and goes on:

"I'd the whole house full. Peruvian idols, Aztec picture writings, Polynesian and Maori war masks; Chinese and Japanese, Burmese and Abyssinian, Hindu and Persian monstrosities of every kind; Egyptian, Cartha-

ginian, Babylonian, Druidical, Gothic—— Well, well! I'm thoroughgoing, and when I do a thing I do it thoroughly. It's enough to say that every variety of libel upon the human face and form that human ingenuity or depravity has ever perpetrated, I'd carefully collected and brought together here."

He waves his hand, with a curious cabalistical ring upon it that once belonged, it is said, to Eliphas Lévi, who had it from Albertus Magnus. But this may be mere report.

"I worked hard, and drank a great deal of coffee," says Andrew, "so much that my old housekeeper began to be afraid something mysterious was the matter with me. She expostulated at last, and I explained. Then she got interested in the book; she was an intelligent woman, poor dear old soul, and she got specially interested in that section of the work which deals with the Grotesque in Nature. Everything in humanity that is purely grotesque—not deformed, unnatural, outrageous, but purely quaint and bizarre—I piled into those chapters. The work is illustrative, you know, as well as descriptive, and the queer photographs and engravings that scientific friends had contributed to this particular portion of it absolutely fascinated the dear old lady.

"'To be sure, Master Andrew' (she had known me from my knickerbocker and peg-top days), 'but them are queer folk. And, my heart alive!'—she uttered a sharp scream—'if that picture isn't the exact moral of Jane Ladds!'

"I glanced over her shoulder. It *was* a portrait of Jane, certainly—a rude little wood cut of the sixteenth century, purporting to be a portrait of a female jester, attached, in her diverting capacity, to the Court of Mary Tudor, during the latter part of her reign, and

mentioned by name in some of the accounts of the Royal household as 'Jeanne la Folle.' Unless the long-dead delineator of her vanished charms has shamefully belied them, Jeanne must have been one of the most grotesquely hideous specimens of womanhood that ever existed. Judge, then, whether the exclamation of my housekeeper awakened my interest, excited my curiosity, or left me apathetic and unmoved!"

We are silent. Our interest, our curiosity, are urging us to hurry on the conclusion of Andrew's story.

"You may suppose that I bombarded my housekeeper with questions. What? Did a living counterpart of the sixteenth-century jocularatrix exist in the nineteenth? What was her station in life? Where was she to be found? In reply, I elicited the fact that Jane Ladds was a countrywoman of my own, the daughter of a wheelwright living in the village of Wickham, in Dorsetshire, where I myself had first seen the light. Jane was some half dozen years my junior, it appeared. My mother had once taken her into her service as under-scuttlermaid, but in a casual encounter with the last new baby (my brother Robert, now commanding his battery of the Royal Horse Artillery at Jelalabad), Jane's facial eccentricities had produced such a marked effect (resulting in convulsions) that the unfortunate *protégée* had been hastily dismissed. Since when she had kept house for her father, and was probably keeping it still; there not being, said my housekeeper, the slightest human probability that any potential husband would endeavor to interfere with the wheelwright's domestic arrangements." There comes a twinkle into Andrew's brown eyes.

"'No man would be mad enough!' the old lady said. Judge of her surprise when I turned upon her and or-

dered her to write—write at once to Dorsetshire, ascertain whether Jane was still alive, still available, willing to take service, under an old acquaintance, in a bachelor's London establishment? Stunned as she was, my housekeeper obeyed. The wages I instructed her to offer were good. An answering letter arrived within the space of a week, announcing Jane Ladds' willingness to accept the offered situation. The letter was nicely written. I read and reread it with morbid excitement. I looked forward to the day of the writer's arrival with an excitement more morbid still. At last the day came, and the woman. . . ."

We inspire deep breaths, and unanimously cry, "Go on!"

"My writing-table was piled high with books—I couldn't see her until she came round the corner," says Andrew, "and stood by my chair. She wore her Sunday clothes—Wickham taste inclines to garments of many colors. In silence I contemplated one of the finest examples of the Animated Grotesque it had ever been my fortune to look upon. Her hair was then red—the brightest red. Her nose was not so much a nose as a pimple. Her mouth was the oddest of buttons. Her forehead a ponderous coffer of bone, overhanging and overshadowing the other features. She was lengthy of arm, short of leg, dumpy of figure. She did not walk—she waddled; she did not sit—she squatted. Her smile was a gash, her curtsy the bob of an elder-pith puppet. She was, as she is now, unique. You are all familiar with her appearance. Search your memories for the moment when that appearance dawned upon you first, intensify your surprise, quadruple your sensations of delight—add to these, imagine yourself dominated by a fascination, weird, strange—inexplicable. In a word——"

Andrew's pipe is out; he is gesticulating excitedly, and his eyes have an odd gleam under his shaggy brows.

"She took possession of me. I had her constantly about me. She brought me everything I wanted. I was never tired of gloating over my new-found treasure. Every accent of her voice, every odd contortion of her features, every awkward movement of her body was a fresh revelation to me. All this while I was working at my book. It was said afterward, in the newspapers, that the entire work, especially the closing chapters on the Human Grotesque, had been written in a fever of enthusiasm. The reviewer never knew how rightly he had guessed. Some of the theories I propounded and proved were curious. That Ugliness is in reality the highest form of Beauty—beauty in the abstract—was one of the mildest. I believed it when I wrote it; for I was madly, passionately infatuated with the ugliest woman I had ever seen—my parlor maid, Jane Ladds!"

We hang upon his words so that our pipes go out, and our whisky and sodas stand untasted at our elbows.

"Yes," says Andrew, drawing a long, hard breath, "she possessed my thoughts—dominated me—waking and sleeping. I had the queerest of dreams, in which, with a joy that was anguish, a rapture that was horror, I saw myself attending crowded assemblies with my wife, Jane Fenn, *née* Ladds, upon my arm. She wore my mother's diamonds, a *décolletée* gown from Worth's; and as we moved along together, sibilant whispers sounded in my ears, and astonished eyes said as plainly, '*What an ugly woman!*'

"Then would come other visions . . . Jane at the head of my table . . . Jane rocking the cradle of our eldest born—an infant who strongly resembled his mother . . . Jane here, Jane there—Jane everywhere!

. . . My nerves, you will guess, must have been in a very queer state.

"All the time Jane Ladds would be deftly moving about me, dusting my books and curios, or going on with her sewing, or, to the utter stupefaction of my housekeeper, I had issued orders that she should sit in the window, where my glance might dwell upon her whenever I lifted my head from my work. Late, late into the small hours, when the sky began to gray toward the dawning, and the ink in my stand got low, she used to keep me company. Not the faintest shadow of impropriety could attach to the association in any sane mind. My housekeeper thought it queer, but nothing more.

"She had—she has—very large, very rough, very red hands. I used to imagine myself kissing one of those hands when I should ask her to be my wife, and conjure up the grotesque smile of shy delight with which she would accept the unheard-of honor. The temptation to snatch and kiss that awful hand became so powerful that it cost me more effort than I can explain to resist its ceaseless promptings. And I would chuckle as I looked at it, and at the bizarre countenance that bent over the stocking that was in process of being darned—Jane's peculiar, shuffling gait seemed to have a peculiarly wearing effect on stockings—and wonder, *if she knew*, how she would look, what she would say? Then she would thread her needle, or bite the end of her worsted.

. . . That hand! that hand! The struggle between the masterful impulse to seize and kiss it, and the shuddering desire not to do anything of the kind, would, upon these occasions, be perfectly indescribable. And—one day—the very day that saw the completion of my book—I yielded!"

"Yes?" we cry, interrogatively. All our eyes are rounded, all our mouths wide open.

"She saw some of my papers flutter to the carpet as I pushed back my chair," Andrew continues, "and obligingly crossed the room, stooped and gathered them up. A kind of mist came over my eyes, and when it cleared away, she was there—by my side—holding the written sheets out to me. That hand! I must—I must! Before the poor creature could hazard a guess at my intentions, I seized it—I kissed it—with a resounding smack. I cried deliriously, 'Jane, will you be my wife? I adore you, Jane!'"

"And what did she do? What did she say? . . ."

"I'm coming to that! She drew away from me, and turned very white, and her poor red hands trembled, and her little button features twitched absurdly with the effort she made to keep from crying. But, as I seized her hands, and went on with my wild asseverations and protestations—Heaven only knows what I said!—the absurdity of the whole thing came on her, and she burst out laughing wildly. Then I caught the infection, and followed suit. Once I began, I couldn't stop. I was shaken like a rag in the wind—torn, possessed by seven devils of risibility. But I went on raging, all through it, that she must marry me! At last she tore herself away, and ran out of the room, breathlessly to burst upon my housekeeper with the information that 'Master was mad, and wanted the doctor.' And she was not far wrong, for by the time he came I was fit for nothing but to be carried to bed. Twenty-four hours later I was raving in brain fever. Seven weeks that red-hot torture lasted, and then I came to myself, and found that through all the delirium and fever I had been patiently, uncomplainingly, tenderly nursed by poor Jane. . . ."

Andrew's voice grows a little husky as he nears the finish.

"Well, when I was convalescent, and knew that I owed my life to her devotion, it seemed to me that only one reparation was possible for the wrong I had done Jane. It was a hard thing to do—the madness being over—the morbid impulse that had swayed me being no longer in the ascendant. But I did it! You may have noticed"—he clears his husky throat—"that is, those among you who have spoken to Ladds—*that she has a singularly sweet voice*—a voice curiously out of keeping with her personality. Well, when she thanked me for my 'kindness' and—refused me, I might, supposing my eyes had been shut, have fancied that I was listening to a beautiful woman. She had been 'marked out by the Lord' to lead a lonely life, she said. When she was a young girl it used to make her cry when the lads went by *her*, 'wi' their vaices turned away,' and the girls laughed when she put on a ribbon or a flower. But she got used to it; and she quite understood that I was trying to make up—like a gentleman as I was;—(a mighty poor kind of gentleman, I felt)—'for summat as I'd said when I didn't know what I was a-saying!' Crazy people had queer ideas, and the village 'softy' had once taken it into his head that he was in love with Jane. . . . And she thanked me for sticking to my word now that I was well, and she'd be my faithful servant always and for ever, Amen! Years have passed since then. . . . Well, she has kept her word. I hope, when the end of everything comes for me, that honest, tender, devoted heart will be beating by my pillow. I hope——"

Andrew breaks off abruptly, and gets up and wishes us all good night.

A VANISHED HAND

WHY," Daymond wrote, "*do you imagine that I shall despise you for this confession? None but a whole-souled, high-hearted woman could have made it! You have said you love me, frankly; and I say in return that had the fountains of my heart not been hopelessly dried up at their sources, they must have sprung forth gladly at such words from you. But the passion of love, dear friend, it is for me no more to know; and I hold you in too warm regard to offer you, in exchange for shekels of pure Ophir gold, a defaced and worthless coinage!*"

As Daymond penned the closing words of the sentence, the last rays of the smoky-red London sunset were withdrawn. Only a little while ago he had replenished the fire with fresh logs; but they were damp, and charred slowly, giving forth no pleasant flame. He struck a match and lighted a taper that stood upon his writing table. It created a feeble oasis of yellow radiance upon the darkness of the great studio, and the shadow of Daymond's head and shoulders bending above it, was cast upward in gigantesque caricature upon the skylight, reduced to frosty white opacity by a burden of March snow.

Daymond poised the drying pen in white, well-kept fingers, and read over what he had written. Underlying all the elegance of well-modeled phrases was the sheer brutality of rejection, definitely expressed. His finely

strung mental organization revolted painfully at the imperative necessity of being cruel.

"She asks for bread," he cried aloud, "and I am giving her a stone!" The lofty walls and domed roof of his workshop gave back the words to him, and his sensitive ear noted the theatrical twang of the echo. Yet the pang of remorse that had moved him to speech was quite genuine.

"*You have heard my story,*" he wrote on.

A great many people had heard it, and had been bored by it; but, sensitive as Daymond's perceptions were, he was not alive to this fact.

"*Seventeen years ago, while I was still a student dreaming of fame in a draughty Paris studio, I met the woman who was destined—I felt it then as I know it now—to be the one love of my life. She was an American, a little older than myself. She was divinely beautiful to me—I hardly know whether she was really so or not. We gave up all, each for each. She left husband, home, friends, to devote her life to me. I——*"

He paused, trying to sum up the list of his own sacrifices, and ultimately left the break, as potent to express much, and went on:

"*Guilty as I suppose we were, we were happy together—how happy I dare not even recall. Twenty-four months our life together lasted, and then came the end. It was the cholera year in Paris; the year which brought me my first foretaste of success in Art, robbed me of all joy in life. . . . She died. Horribly! suddenly! And the best of me lies buried in her grave!*"

The muscles of his throat tightened with the rigor that accompanies emotion; his eyelids smarted. He threw back his still handsome head, and a tear fell shining on the delicately scented paper underneath his hand. He

looked at the drop as it spread and soaked into a damp little circle, and made no use of the blotting paper to remove the stain. If any crudely candid observer had told Daymond that he dandled this desolation of his—took an æsthetic delight in his devotion to the confined handful of dust that had once lived and palpitated at his touch, he would have been honestly outraged and surprised. Yet the thing was true. He had made his sorrow into a hobby-horse during the last fifteen years of honest regret, of absolute faithfulness to the memory of his dead mistress. It gratified him to see the well-trained creature dance and perform the tricks of the *haute école*. He was aware that the romance of that past, which he regretted with such real sincerity, added something to the glamour of his achieved reputation, his established fame, in the eyes of the world. The halo which it cast about him had increased his desirability in the eyes of the great lady who, after affording him numberless unutilized opportunities for the declaration of a sentiment which her large handsome person and her large handsome property had inspired in many other men, had written him a frank, womanly letter, placing these unreservedly at his disposal. . . . And Daymond, in his conscious fidelity and unconscious vanity, must perforce reply wintrily, nipping with the east wind of non-reciprocity the mature passion tendrils which sought to twine themselves about him. It was a painful task, though the obligation of it tickled him agreeably—another proof of the inconsistency of the man, who may be regarded as a type of humanity; for we are all veritable Daymonds, in that the medium which gives us back to our own gloating eyes day by day is never the crystal mirror of Truth, but such a lying glass as the charlatans

of centuries ago were wont to make for ancient Kings and withered Queens to mop and mow in.

Daymond pushed back his chair, and got up, and began to pace from end to end of the studio. The costly Moorish carpets muffled the falling of his footsteps, which intermittently sounded on the polished interspaces of the parqueted floor, and then were lost again in velvet silence. In the same way, his tall figure, with its thoughtfully bending head and hands clasped behind it, would be swallowed up among the looming shadows of tall easels or faintly glimmering suggestions of sculptured figures which here and there thrust portions of limbs, or angles of faces, out of the dusk—to appear again with the twilit north window for its background, or emerge once more upon the borders of the little island of taper-shine. So he moved amid the works of his genius restlessly and wearily to and fro; and the incoherent mutterings which broke from him showed that his thoughts were running in the beaten track of years.

“If I could see her again—if our eyes and lips and hands and hearts might meet for even the fraction of a minute, as they used to do, it would be enough. I could wait then patiently through the slow decay of the cycles for the turning of the key in the rusty wards, and the clanking of my broken fetters on the echoing stone, and the burst of light that shall herald my deliverance from prison! . . .” He lifted his arms above his head. “Oh, my dead love, my dear love! if you are near, as I have sometimes fancied you were, speak to me, touch me—once, only once! . . .” He waited a moment with closed eyelids and outstretched hands, and then, with a dry sob of baffled longing, stumbled back to his writing table, where the little taper was flickering its last, and dropped into his arm-chair.

"And other women talk of love to me. What wonder I am cold as ice to them, remembering her!"

It was a scene he had gone through scores upon scores of times—words and gestures varying according to the pathetic inspiration of the moment. He knew that he was pale, and that his eyes were bleared with weeping, and he had a kind of triumph in the knowledge that the pain of retrospective longing and of present loneliness was so poignantly real and keen. Out of the blackness behind his chair at that moment came a slight stir and rustle—not the sough of a vagrant draught stirring among folds of tapestry, but an undeniably human sound. But half displeased with the suspicion that there had been a witness to his agony, he turned—turned and saw Her, the well-beloved of the old, old time, standing very near him.

Beyond a vivid sensation of astonishment, he felt little. He did not tremble with fear—what was there in that perfectly familiar face to fear? He did not fall, stammering with incoherent rapture, at her feet. And yet, a few moments ago, he had felt that for one such sight of her, returned from the Unknowable to comfort him—dragged back from the mysterious Beyond by his strong yearnings—he would have bartered fame, honor, and wealth—submitted his body to unheard-of tortures—shed his blood to the last heart's drop. He had prayed that a miracle might be performed—and the prayer had been granted. He had longed—desperately longed—to look on her once more—and the longing was satisfied. And he could only stare wide-eyed, and gape with dropped jaw, and say stupidly:

"You?"

For answer she turned her face—in hue, and line, and feature, no one whit altered—so that the light might

illumine it fully, and stood so regarding him in silence. Every pore of her seemed to drink in the sight of him;—her lips were parted in breathless expectancy. Every hair of the dark head—dressed in the fashion of fifteen years ago; every fold of the loose dress she wore—a garment he knew again; every lift and fall of her bosom seemed to cry out dumbly to him. There was a half-quenched spark glimmering in each of her deep eyes, that might have wanted only one breath from his mouth to break out into flame. Her hands hung clasped before her. It seemed as if they were only waiting for the signal to unclasp—for the outspread arms to summon him to her heart again. But the signal did not come. He caught a breath, and repeated, dully:

“You! It is you?”

She returned:

“It is I!”

The well-known tones! Recollection upsprang in his heart like a gush of icy waters. For a moment he was thrilled to the center of his being. But the smitten nerve chords ceased to vibrate in another moment, and he rose to offer her a chair.

She moved across and took it, as he placed it by the angle of the wide hearth; and lifted her skirts aside with a movement that came back to him from a long way off, like her tone in speaking—and, shading her deep gray eyes from the dull red heat with her white left hand, looked at him intently. He, having pushed his own seat back into the borders of the shadowland beyond the taper’s gleam and the hearth glow, looked back at her. That hand of hers bore no ring. When he had broken the plain gold link that had fettered it in time past, he had set in its place a ruby that had belonged to his mother. The ruby was on his finger now. He hid it

out of sight in the pocket of his velvet painting coat, not knowing why he did so. And at that moment she broke the silence with:

"You see I have come to you at last!"

He replied, with conscious heaviness:

"Yes—I see!"

"Has the time seemed long? . . . We have no time, you know, where . . . Is it many days since? . . ."

"Many days!"

"My poor Robert! . . Weeks? . . Months? . . Not years? . . ."

"Fifteen years. . . ."

"Fifteen years! And you have suffered all that time. Oh, cruel! cruel! If there was more light here, I might see your face more plainly. Dear face! I shall not love it less if there are lines and marks of grief upon it—it will not seem less handsome to me at forty than it did at twenty-five! Ah, I wish there was more light!" The old pettishly coaxing tones! "But yet I do not wish for it, lest it should show you any change in *me*!"

"You are not changed in the least." He drew breath hard. "It might be yesterday——," he said, and left the sentence unfinished.

"I am glad," said the voice that he had been wont to recall to memory as wooingly sweet. "They have been kinder than I knew. . . . Oh! it has always been so painful to recall," she went on, with the old little half shrug, half shudder, "that I died an *ugly* death—that I was not pretty to look at as I lay in my coffin! . . ."

Daymond recoiled inwardly. That vanity, in a woman, should not be eradicated by the fact of her having simply ceased to exist, was an hypothesis never before administered for his mental digestion.

"How curiously it all happened," she said, her full

tones trembling a little. "It was autumn—do you remember? —and the trees in the Bois and the gardens of the Luxembourg were getting yellowy brown. There were well-dressed crowds walking on the Boulevards, and sitting round the little tables outside the restaurants. One could smell chloride of lime and carbolic acid crossing the gutters, and see the braziers burning at the corners of infected streets, and long strings of hearses going by; but nothing seemed so unlikely as that either of us should be taken ill and die. We were too wicked, you said, and too happy! . . . only the good, miserable people were carried off, because any other world would be more suitable to them than this. . . . It was nonsense, of course, but it served us to laugh at. Then, because you could not sell your great Salon picture, and we could not afford the expense, you gave a supper at the *Café des Trois Oiseaux* (*Cabinet particulier No. 6*)—and Valéry and the others joined us. I was so happy that night . . . my new dress became me . . . I wore yellow roses—your favorite Maréchal Niel's. When I was putting them in my bosom and my hair you came behind and kissed me on the shoulder. O, *mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* I can feel it now! We went to the Variétés, and then to supper. I had never felt so gay. People are like that, I remember having heard, just when they are going to die. Valéry gaped—I believe he was half in love with me—and I teased him because I knew you would be jealous. In those days you would have been jealous of the studio *écorché*. Ha! ha! ha!"

Daymond shuddered. The recurrent French phrases jarred on him; something in her voice and manner scarified inexpressibly his sensitive perceptions. He wondered, dumbly, whether she had always been like this? She went on:

"And then, suddenly, in the midst of the laughter, the champagne, the good dishes—the pains of hell!" She shuddered. "And then a blank, and waking up in bed at the hospital, still in those tortures—and getting worse and seeing in your white face that I was going to die! Drip-drip! I could feel your tears falling upon my face, upon my hand; but I was even impatient of you in my pain. Once I fancied that I heard myself saying that I hated you. Did I really?"

"I think—I believe you did! But, of course——" Daymond stopped, and shuddered to the marrow as she leaned across to him caressingly, so near that her draperies brushed his knee and her breath fanned upon his face.

"Imagine it!" she cried, "that I *hated* you! You to whom I had given myself—you for whom I left my——"

He interrupted, speaking in an odd, strained voice: "Never mind that now."

"I had always wished to die first," she resumed, "but not in that way; not without leaving you a legacy of kind words and kisses. Ah!" (her voice stole to his ears most pleadingly), "do you know that I have been here, I cannot tell how long, and you have not kissed me once, darling?"

She rose up in her place—she would have come to him, but he sprang to his feet, and thrust out both hands to keep her off, crying:

"No! no!"

She sank back into her seat, looking at him wide-eyed and wonderingly. "Is he afraid of me?" she whispered to herself.

"I am not afraid of you," Daymond returned almost roughly. "But you must make allowances for me at first. Your sudden coming—the surprise——"

"Ah yes! the surprise—and the joy——?"

He cleared his throat and looked another way. He was shamedly conscious that the emotion that stiffened his tongue and hampered his gestures was something widely different from joy. He spoke again, confusedly. "This seems like old times—before——"

"Before I died," she said, "without bidding good-bye to you. Dear! if you guessed how I have longed to know what you said and did when it was all over, you would not mind telling me. . . . '*Are they grieving—those whom I have left behind?*' is a question that is often asked in the place I come from. You were sorry? You cried? Ah! I know you must have cried!"

"I believe," Daymond returned, moving restlessly in his chair, "that I did. And I—I kissed you, though the doctors told me not to. I wanted to catch the cholera and die, too, I believe! . . ."

"Yes?"

"And when the people came with—the coffin, I"—he bit his lip—"I would not let them touch you! . . ."

"My poor boy!"

He winced from the tenderness. He felt with indescribable sensations the light pressure of that well-known once well-loved touch upon his arm.

"And then—after the funeral, I believe I had a brain fever." He passed his hand through his waving, slightly grizzled hair, as if to assist his lagging memory—really, as an excuse for shaking off that intolerable burden of her hand. "And when I recovered I found there was no way to forgetfulness"—he heard her sigh faintly—"except through work. I worked then—I am working still."

"Always alone?"

"Generally alone. I have never married."

"Of course not!"

A faint dissent began to stir in him at this matter-of-fact acquiescence in his widowed turtle-like celibacy. "It may interest you to know," he observed, with a touch of the pompous manner which had grown upon him with the growth of his reputation, "that my career has been successful in the strongest sense of the word. I have become, I may say, one of the leaders of the world of Art. Upon the decease or resignation of the President of the —, it is more than probable that I shall be invited to occupy his vacant place. And an intimation has reached me, from certain eminent quarters"—he paused weightily—"that a baronetcy will be conferred upon me, in that event!"

"Yes?"

The tone betrayed an absolute lack of attention. She had once been used to take a keen interest in his occupations; to be cast down by his failures and elated by his successes. Had that enthusiasm constituted the greater part of her charm? In its absence Daymond began to find her—must it be confessed?—but indifferent company.

In the embarrassment that momentarily stiffened him, an old habit came to his rescue. Before he knew it, he had taken a cigar from a silver box upon the writing table, and was saying, with the politely apologetic accent of the would-be smoker:

"May I? You used not to mind!"

She made a gesture of assent. As the first rings of bluish vapor mounted into the air, Daymond found her watching him with those intent, expectant eyes.

Feeling himself bound to make some observation, he said: "It is very wonderful to me to see you here! It was very good of you to come!"

She returned: "They had to let me come, I think! I

begged so—I prayed so, that at last——” She paused. Daymond was not listening. He was looking at her steadfastly and pondering. . . .

It had been his whim, in the first poignancy of bereavement, to destroy all portraits of her, so that with the lapse of years no faulty touch should bewray the memory of her vanished beauty. It struck him now for the first time that his brush had played the courtier, and flattered her, for the most part, unblushingly. He found himself criticizing unfavorably the turn of her throat and the swell of her bosom, and the dark voluptuous languishment of her look. The faint perfume of heliotrope that was shaken forth now, as of old time, from her hair and her garments no longer intoxicated, but sickened him. This, then, was the woman he had mourned for fifteen years! He began to feel that he had murmured unwisely at the dispensation of Providence. He began to revolt at this recrudescence of an outworn passion—to realize that at twenty-five he had taken a commonplace woman for a divinity—a woman whom, if she had not died when she did, he would have wearied of—ended perhaps in hating. He found himself in danger of hating her now.

“At last they let me come. They said I should repent it—as if I could!” Her eyes rested on him lingeringly; her hand stilled the eager trembling of her lips. “Never! Of course, you seemed a little strange at first. You are not quite—not quite yourself now; it is natural—after fifteen years. And presently, when I tell you—— Oh! what will you say when I tell you all?”

She left her chair and came toward him, so swiftly that he had not time to avoid her. She laid her hand on his shoulder and bent her mouth to his ear. One of her peculiarities had been that her lips were always cold,

even when her passion burned most fiercely. The nearness of those lips, once so maddeningly desirable and sweet, made Daymond's flesh creep horribly. He breathed with difficulty, and the great drops of agony stood thickly on his forehead—not with weak, superstitious terror of the ghost; with unutterable loathing of the woman.

"Listen!" she said. "They are wise in the place I came from; they know things that are not known here . . . You have heard it said that once in the life of every human being living upon earth comes a time when the utterance of a wish will be followed by its fulfilment. The poor might be made rich, the sick well, the sad merry, the loveless beloved—in one moment—if they could only know when that moment comes! But not once in a million million lifetimes do they hit upon it; and so they live penniless and in pain, and sorrowful and lonely, all their lives. I let my chance go by, like many others, long before I died; but yours is yet to come." Her voice thrilled with a note of wild triumph; the clasp of her arm tightened on his neck. "Oh, love!" she cried; "the wonderful moment is close at hand! It is midnight now"—she pointed to the great north window, through which the frosty silver face of the moon was staring in relief against a framed-in square of velvet blackness, studded with twinkling star-points—"but with the first signs of the dawn that you and I have greeted together, heart of my heart!—how many times in the days that may come again!—with the graying of the East and the paling of the stars comes the Opportunity for you. Now, do you UNDERSTAND?"

He understood and quailed before her. But she was blindly confident in his truth, stupidly reliant on his constancy.

"When it comes, beloved, you shall take me in your arms—breathe your wish upon these lips of mine, in a kiss. Say, while God's ear is open, 'Father, give her back to me, living and loving, as of old!' and I shall be given—I shall be given!"

She threw both arms about him and leaned to him, and sobbed and laughed with the rapture of her revelation and the anticipation of the joy that was to come.

"Remember, you must not hesitate, or the golden chance will pass beyond recall, and I shall go back whence I came, never more to return—never more to clasp you, dearest one, until you die too, and come to me (are you cold, that you shudder so?)—and be with me for always. Listen, listen!"

As she lifted her hand the greatest of all the great clock voices of London spoke out the midnight hour. As other voices answered from far and near Daymond shuddered, and put his dead love from him, and rose up trembling and ghastly pale.

They moved together to the window, and stood looking out. The weather was about to change; the snow was melting, the thaw drip plashed heavily from roof gutters and balconies, cornices and window ledges. As she laid her hand once more upon his shoulder the stars began to fade out one by one, and in a little while from then the eastward horizon quivered with the first faint throes of dawn.

"Wish!" she cried. "Now! now! before it is too late!" She moved as if to throw herself again upon his breast; but he thrust her from him with resolute hands that trembled no more.

"I wish," he said very distinctly, "to be Sir Robert Daymond, Baronet, and President of the —— before the year is out!"

She fell away from him, and waned, and became unsubstantial and shadowy like the ghost she was, and unlike the thing of flesh and blood she had seemed before. Nothing remained to her of lifelikeness but the scorn and anger, the anguish and reproach of her great eyes.

"Only the dead are faithful to Love—because they are dead," she said. "The living live on—and forget! They may remember sometimes to regret us—beat their breasts and call upon our names—but they shudder if we answer back across the distance; and if we should offer to come back, 'Return!' they say! 'go and lie down in the comfortable graves we have made you; there is no room for you in your old places any more!' They told me I should be sorry for coming; but I would not listen, I had such confidence. I am wiser now! Good-bye!"

A long sigh fluttered by him in the semi-obscurity, like a bird with a broken wing. There was a rattling of curtain rings, the dull sough of falling tapestry, and the opening and closing of a door. She was gone! And Daymond, waking from strangely dreamful slumbers to the cheerlessness of dying embers and burned-out candle, rang the bell for his servant, and ordered lights. A few minutes later saw him, perfectly dressed, stepping into his cab.

"Chesterfield Gardens, Mayfair," he said, giving the direction to his valet for transference to the groom.

"Beg pardon, sir, but Lady Mary Fraber's servant is still waiting!" The man pointed back to the house.

"Ah!" said Daymond, who had had a passing glimpse of alien cord gaiters reposing before his hall-fire. "Tell him I have taken the answer to his mistress myself."

And as he spoke he scattered a handful of torn-up squares of paper—the fragments of a letter—in largesse to the night and the gusty weather.

AN ORDEAL BY FIRE

MR. LANTER was bookkeeping clerk in a New York dry-goods store. For his services he was remunerated at the rate of fifteen dollars per week. His bedroom at the boarding-house with daily breakfast and three meals on the Sunday, cost him ten dollars; the remaining five supplied all other necessities—fed him at cheap restaurants, dressed him from cheap clothing stores, and allowed him to send a cash bill now and then to his mother, who lived in a New Hampshire village on tea, bread and sauce, wore her hair in looped bell-ropes on either side of her forehead and a rosette behind, and thought her son the most splendid man in the world. But despite heroic efforts, Mr. Lanter had not succeeded in putting by anything against a rainy day. As to marriage, it was not to be dreamt of, which is probably the reason why Mr. Lanter dreamed of it so frequently. But the feminine form that figured in those dreams was not that of a typist, or a sales-lady, or even a chorus-girl or variety artist. Mr. Lanter was a young man with a turn for reading, who regularly spent his Sundays at the Cooper Institute, and he did not feel that he could undertake to do his duty as a husband by anything short of a heroine of romantic classical fiction. He had had imaginary love-passages with several of these, both ancient and modern. *The Faëry Queen* had given him Britomart, and the *Volsunga Saga* had supplied him with Brunhild. Hypatia's erudition made her a little alarming, but the affair was pleasant while it lasted; and Iseult was too

dark for Mr. Lanter's taste, but he changed the color of her locks as expeditiously as a French hairdresser, and roamed the forest ways with her more appreciatively than Prosper. Theaters Mr. Lanter did not frequent, because Mrs. Lanter regarded such places as pitfalls dug by the devil for the capture of unwary young America, and he had promised his mother he would not visit them. Indeed, had he been inclined to go back on his word, he could not have afforded to do so. But neither concert-halls, museums, nor circuses figured on Mrs. Lanter's black list, because she had forgotten to specify them; and one half-holiday Mr. Lanter found himself entering Kneeman's Star Musée with an order.

The Kneeman Musée is a big, opulent building, with a central dome of colored glass, a gorgeous façade ornamented with groups of sculptured figures and a gilded vestibule where are displayed an array of life-sized photographs and gigantic colored posters illustrating the wonders to be seen within; promising upon this occasion, among other exquisite novelties, the unique whistling entertainment of Madame Smithers, the Kentucky Mocking Bird; the Celebrated Centaur Family, in their feats of Equitation; the Balancing Bonellis, in their electrifying plank-and-ladder interlude; Madame la Comtesse Püspök Ladany, the Beautiful Hungarian (heroine of one of the most sensational European elopements) in her Elegant Effects of Equestrianism upon the highly-trained Arab Maimoun, assisted by Rurik the Gitano, who had the honor, upon the sensational occasion above alluded to, of eloping with Madame la Comtesse. Then came the Mermaids in a Tank Act, and three-inch notes of exclamation clamorously invited attention to the American Girl Giantess, Mademoiselle Minota, nineteen years of age, nine feet

in height, weighing four hundred and twenty-six pounds, able to lift a weight of one hundred and forty pounds with one hand. . . . The remainder of the bill was filled with dwarfs, performing lions, snake-charmers, and ventriloquists.

Mr. Lanter presented nothing remarkable to the ordinary observation. He was fair, undersized, and short-sighted, and the necktie he had chosen was of a vivid salmon-pink, trying to his complexion, which had been injured by overwork and close confinement in a glass counting-hutch lighted by electricity, and heated by steam. He followed his companion, who was a smart, bustling young salesman with a lady-killing reputation, and sporting proclivities; and as he went he smiled a little vaguely, and his mouth was not quite shut, a negligence which deprives the expression of intellectuality. They had fauteuil seats so close to the Ring that their knees rubbed against the low velvet-cushioned barrier that enclosed the sand-strewn space, which seemed to Mr. Lanter to be a brown central-patch, in a gorgeous, multi-colored dream. The dome above, all glass and gilding, the pretty women in the boxes, the perambulating vendors of candy and ices, the orchestra tuning up in a gilded balcony on the left of the stage, the whiffs of menagerie, gas, and stabling which escaped from the *coulisses*, the people who pushed past into their places, Madame Smithers trilling and piping in emulation of the feathered songsters of American groves, the Centaur Family upon their gaily-trapped steeds, the bursts of applause, the shouts of laughter, were all made of dream-stuff. . . . But when heavy tableau-curtains rose upon a scene representing a mediæval banqueting hall, and revealed the American Girl Giantess, throned upon a high seat, arrayed in gilded chain-mail and flowing purple

draperies, a sword in her large white right hand, a crimson cloak upon her shoulders and a dragon-crested helm upon her large fair head, the start Mr. Lanter gave would have awakened any ordinary sleeper. But the dream closed in again, as Miss Minota rose, and, bowing to the right, to the left, to the middle, descended the baize-covered staircase which led from the stage to the Ring. . . . Other spectators saw a young woman monstrously overgrown, with tow-colored hairplaits as thick as coir-cable, and blue eyes as round as silver dollars, who was well-proportioned in her huge way, and who, if looked at through the wrong end of an opera-glass, when divested of her tawdry theatrical trappings, might have appeared an honest, ordinary young person of average good looks. But Mr. Lanter saw a golden roof-ridge and a ring of magic fire roaring up, and the Brunhild of his visions; and breathed hard, and felt a clammy sensation about the palms of the hands, while his heart drummed heavily against the lining of his ready-made waistcoat. He must have been very pale or very purple in the face, for his companion nudged him.

"Guess you're feeling off color! . . . Like to get out into the air? . . . If so, I'll keep your seat," he whispered; but Mr. Lanter shook his head.

The band struck up a march, Miss Minota descended into the arena, a voluble gentleman in evening dress, who acted as showman, and, when necessary, as interpreter, walking in the shadow of her elbow. She seemed, indeed, an overwhelming example of feminine physical development as she gravely performed her round, replying in monosyllables to the remarks that were made to her by members of the audience, complying with their expressed desire to shake her enormous hand. Mr. Lanter was hot and cold by turns as her monumental pro-

portions drew nearer; he meant to rise in his place and boldly engage her in conversation; he got as far as getting on his legs. It seemed that the large blue eyes of the giantess dropped upon him inquiringly; he almost fancied her about to pause. But his tongue refused to utter the word which would have arrested her progress. . . . She swept past, and it was as though the mainsail of a yacht had gone over on the starboard tack, emptying a whole breeze out of an acre of canvas. Another moment and she had ascended to the stage, her draperies of crimson and purple trailing as she went; she had lifted her weights, respectively guaranteed at one hundred and one hundred and forty pounds avoirdupois; she had made her three bows, and the tableau-curtains had descended and closed. Thenceforward Mr. Lanter took no interest in the entertainment. With fishy eyes he sat, retrospective, unobservant; and his companion, the lively Mr. Goter, found him mighty dull.

"Oh, look here! . . . Say now! what's up with you?" he protested, as they walked home together through the crowded streets.

The clang of street-car gongs, the intermittent roar and rattle of the elevated railway, mingled with the blare of tin horns, and the clamor of voices. It was hot May weather, and there was a smell upon the languid air that seemed to combine in itself the flavor of rotten fruit, the musky odor of African skins, the pungent acridity of frying oil, and the rankness of coarse tobacco.

"Up with me? Why, I'm all right," said Mr. Lanter, "and I've had a real good time, thanks to you, old man!"

"Come, have a drink?" said the pacified Goter, and they turned in at the swing doors of a beer saloon. "Bully, wasn't she?" he broke out, after ordering two

iced bocks. "My style all over! Guess I've a good mind to take her on!" and he winked knowingly.

Mr. Lanter set down his tall glass of untasted Münchener. "Look here, who are you talking about?" He was salmon-pink to the edge of his black Derby hat, and his pale blue eyes had angry sparks in them.

"That girl that did the jugglin' business on the plank-and-ladder," responded Goter. "Black eyes, black hair, high color, and spankin' action. Did you s'pose I meant that walkin' grain-elevator in the tin armor? No, sir!"

He had yet another fulminating witticism on hand, and he discharged it. Before it had done crackling he saw stars, for the placable Lanter had suddenly smitten him upon the nose.

"Good thunder! what are you up to, anyway?" spluttered the astonished Mr. Goter.

"Hol' off there! Go easy!" shouted the barkeeper. Half a dozen men, their drinks in their hands, their hats tilted back from interested faces, had gathered round, and a colored boy was mopping the red-stained marble table with a wet cloth.

"He—he insulted a lady!" gasped Mr. Lanter, "and I struck him! If he does it again—I'll do it again! . . . Mind that!" The tone and the look with which he delivered the final warning convinced Mr. Goter that he had better mind.

Thenceforward he ceased to regard Mr. Lanter as a "Willie" and Mr. Lanter ceased to regard himself as a Christian young man. His own violence had shocked him. There must be a good deal of cold reason, he reflected, at the bottom of Mrs. Lanter's inveterate prejudice against public places of entertainment, and his conscience pricked him. But she had made him promise that he would not go to "theaters," and he salved his

conscience by reminding himself that he had kept his word. But he went again and yet again to Kneeman's Star Musée. And upon the third occasion he mustered up courage to speak to Miss Minota.

"How do you do?" he blurted out. Then as an afterthought he blurted out, "Mademoiselle." He had to tilt his head quite back to look up into Miss Minota's large fair moon-face. He wondered what she would say if anybody told her that she was his ideal of womanhood?

"I guess I am very well, thank you," responded the giantess. She had a plaintive, mooring voice, and despite the usage of a public career, she seemed little less bashful than Mr. Lanter.

"Do you like N'York?" Mr. Lanter inquired.

"Well," Miss Minota returned, "I guess I do!" She sighed as she continued: "But one place is much the same as another to you—when you don't see anythin' more of it than the inside of the hotel where you happen to be located, and the inside of the hall where you chance to be exhibitin'."

"Why, now, that's a shame!" said Mr. Lanter, growing red with sympathy. "Don't your friends take you around some, when you feel you'd like to go?"

"I suppose they'd be real pleased," said Miss Minota, after an instant's consideration, "if I didn't attract so much attention. But when you're too big to go on the cars, like other folk, or pass along the sidewalk without blockin' it——" She shrugged her enormous shoulders with a little air of fatigue, and the gentleman in evening dress, who officiated as showman, gave her the signal to move. "Good-afternoon!" she said graciously, and passed on.

But Mr. Lanter's brain was surging with sympathy. "My gracious!" he cried to himself, "is it possible that

that splendid creature isn't happy?" A vague look of gentle melancholy was certainly floating on the surface of those limpid china-blue eyes. He breathed through his nose and clenched his fists, one of which already bore a proof impression of Mr. Goter's projecting front tooth. And the very next half-holiday found him waiting at the side door through which professionals found entrance to the back scenes of Kneeman's. One or two sallow, cropped men in furred overcoats passed in, one of them in company with a black-eyed, vivacious, middle-aged woman, who conversed with her fingers, her shoulders, and every muscle of her face—and in whom Mr. Lanter recognized Goter's houri. Then a vehicle like a hotel-omnibus, only taller and shinier, drawn by a pair of stout horses, pulled up by the curb; two men, moustached, and dressed in a kind of buff uniform faced with red (Mr. Lanter recognized it as the livery common to the attendants of the Musée), got down from the box seat and opened the omnibus door. . . . Mr. Lanter's heart thumped wildly as a colossal foot and ankle, appareled in a pink silk stocking and rosetted black satin shoe, cautiously descended to the ground, and the rest of Miss Minota followed by gradual instalments until the giantess stood upright on the pavement, her nine feet of height handsomely accentuated by an umbrageous hat, with a plume of nodding feathers which might have served for the central ornament of a canopy of state. She inclined this tremendous headgear in gracious recognition of Mr. Lanter. Mr. Lanter took off his hat with his best manner, and boldly stepped forward.

A large pink flush invaded the giantess's immense cheeks, previously of a pale or dough-colored complexion. "Won't you walk in a minute?" she said, in a timid, fluttering way. Then, not without difficulty, she went in

at the side-door, Mr. Lanter followed, the attendants mounted to their seats, and the large shiny omnibus drove away.

The sensation of moving and speaking in a dream bore heavily upon Mr. Lanter as he followed the tall, stooping figure of the giantess up a short flight of stairs and through what seemed to be a labyrinth of winding passages, each of which seemed more dark and dusky than the preceding one, and conveyed a stronger olfactory impression of gas, mice, and turpentine. But the labyrinth ended in a vast echoing chaos of shaky canvas scenes and machinery, which Miss Minota introduced as the stage. The iron curtain that separated the stage from the auditorium was down, and they stood together in the midst of a heterogeneous jumble of properties among which Mr. Lanter recognized the plank-and-ladder of the equilibrists, the gilded props and rubber-covered block-tackle used by the tight-rope dancer, the belled and ribboned saddles employed by the Centaur Family, and Miss Minota's mediæval throne, flanked by the gilded weights employed in her exhibition of manual strength.

"Won't you——" Involuntarily he pointed to the gaudy throne-seat.

"Well," said the giantess, "I don't know but what I will sit down—just a minute." Seated, her large round face and china-blue, rather foolish eyes were above the level of Mr. Lanter's as he stood before her. Certainly, but for the suet dumpling pallor of her fair complexion and a prevailing flabbiness, the result of insufficient exercise, Miss Minota would have been good-looking. "I guess I ought to thank you for being so polite!" she said, and her tone and accent were homely as those of the New England village-folk among whom Mr. Lanter had

been raised. "I guess you thought I acted like I was silly just now; but boys do scare me so. . . . If there's one thing more than another I dasn't face, it's a boy; and you bet boys know it, and lay along for me—the nasty little things! So there's another reason why I can't go round like other folks—even if the management wouldn't object to my givin' the show away!" She folded her immense hands upon her knees and looked placidly at Mr. Lanter.

"But why should the management object, Miss—Mademoiselle?" asked Mr. Lanter, standing, very red and stiff and embarrassed, at Miss Minota's knee, like a somewhat dull little boy about to say a lesson.

"Because once folks have seen me for nothin', they'll leave the pay-place alone," said Miss Minota. "It's human natur', take it how you will. An' I'm only Mademoiselle on the posters. My first professional exhibitin' tour was in the State of Minnesota, an' that's how I got my professional name. My own name seemed kind of one-horse for a poster—Quilt—Miss Hattie Quilt of Smartsville, New Hampshire, I was when I lived to-home."

"I've been to Smartsville," said Mr. Lanter eagerly, as though it were a bond. "It's only forty miles from Saunderstown where I was raised. My mother, Mrs. Lanter, she lives there now. And Quilt's a name I've heard. . . . There was old Deacon Quilt that had the lawsuit——"

"I guess he was my grandfather!" said Miss Minota soberly.

Mr. Lanter tilted his head, trying to remember what the lawsuit had been about.

"It was a suit about an iron bedstead," said Miss Minota. "It's 'most ten years ago. Grandfather bought

it for me, because I'd crowded mother out of hers. We slep' together till I was 'bout eleven years old. Well, grandfather measured me himself for that bed, but it didn't get delivered for a month on end, and I'd growed beyond my measure, and didn't fit it, or it didn't fit me. Mother tried to convince the old man by showin' him my frocks—she'd let 'em down eight inches only four weeks back, an' they was hardly on speakin' terms with my boot-tops by then—but he said on'y Jonah's gourd growed at that rate, an' the dry-goods man must change the bedstead or he'd go to law. An' the dry-goods man said rather than have legal trouble he'd change the bed for a bigger, 'n he did; but the new one was six weeks in gettin' delivered, and it was the same story over again—it didn't fit me, nohow! So grandfather went to law, an' the case was tried in the Smartsville court-house, an' grandfather would 'a got damages if the dry-goods man's lawyer hadn't asked to have me produced in court. It was my first public appearance, an' I was dretful shy. People used to laugh at me bein' so shy, but you've no idee what a tryin' thing it is bein' bigger 'n anybody else—when you first find it out!" The large form of Miss Minota was convulsed by a shudder. "You'd hide yourself in a mousehole, if it was big enough to hold you. Well, they called Miss Hattie Quilt, an' I got up an' straightened out, for I'd been settin' cramped in a kind of pew, an' it seemed even to myself as if I'd never end. An' the judge looked at me through his glasses. My! didn't he stare! An' he asked how old I was, an' I said 'Risin' twelve'; an' the judge allowed if I kep' on risin' I might get somewheres in time; an' that a man with a granddaughter like that growin' up about him ought to provide indiarubber bedsteads an' a sliding roof. An' all the folks laughed an' grandfather had to pay sixty dol-

lars damages an' costs." Miss Minota's gentle, monotonous, mooing voice left off talking; she paused to draw breath.

"And then——?" said Mr. Lanter, in whose brain dim and faded hearsays connected with the Quilt law-case were stirring.

"Then grandfather took a kind of down on me," Miss Minota explained, "though he'd set a deal of store on me before. An' mother used to beg me with tears in her eyes not to grow at that rate; an' I tried not—hard; but I kep' on. I stinted meals an' wore an iron pound-weight on my head under my hat—but still I kep' on. An' at last grandfather opinioned to father and mother it was time to let out the house—or to let out me. So they hired me to Dan Slater—perhaps you've heard of Slater's Traveling Museum of Marvels—an'——"

"I should have thought they'd been ashamed!" burst out Mr. Lanter, flushing to the temples. "Their own flesh and blood!"

"That's what other people kep' saying to grandfather, 'your own flesh and blood!'" returned Miss Minota. "But all grandfather ever said was that there was more flesh and blood than he'd bargained for, and he'd thank 'em to 'tend to their own affairs."

"I don't think he was a nice kind of man," said little Mr. Lanter, thrilling with indignation to his toes and finger-tips, "to send a young girl away from her home and her mother—out into the world—among strangers who might have treated her badly!" He looked up at his ideal of womanhood with passionate chivalry.

"Oh, but they didn't treat me badly!" said Miss Minota. "Dan Slater was real kind. An' when I outgrew the caravan I traveled in at first, he telescoped two together—an' as one of 'em had been made for the

giraffe, I got on pretty well. But I've never got used to bein' made a show of, an' stared at, and asked questions by people, whether they're ordinary folks or Kings an' Queens an' Serene Highnesses—an' I guess I never will. Perhaps you wouldn't believe it's lonsome to be bigger 'n anybody else—but it makes me feel so, times!"

"I wish I could prevent your feeling lonesome!" burst out Mr. Lanter, before he was aware. "I wish I could carry you right away from this"—he waved his hand comprehensively—"and take care of you. I wouldn't let a rough breath blow on you as I could help. I'd stand between you and the world, and shelter you—I'd spend my life in doing it—and spend it gladly!" He forgot himself in what he was saying, and therefore did not blush, but his awkward, plain, and homely little figure in its badly-fitting store clothes was a spectacle to smile at. "Oh! if you knew all I'd thought and dreamed of since I saw you first!" he said, with a quiver of passion in his voice. "It seems like a dream to be talking to you here. . . . If it didn't how could I tell you straight out as I am telling you now, what I haven't even had the courage to write—that I—I——"

Miss Minota modestly reared her Alpine height from the mediæval throne as a trampling of feet sounded from the dusty passage beyond. "I guess I have got to go and dress," she said modestly.

"Oh, please wait one minute!" pleaded Mr. Lanter. "You must know it, if you never speak to me or look at me again. I think you the grandest, most glorious woman I ever saw! I'm ready to die for you right now, if the dying of a common store clerk would be any use! But it wouldn't," said Mr. Lanter, "and so I must go on thinking of you, and worshipping you, and loving you to

the end of my days——” He broke down, blushing and stammering.

“Oh, my!” cried Miss Minota. In her surprise she sat down again so unguardedly that the mediæval throne creaked and tottered. “You don’t mean it? Honest, you don’t?”

“I mean it with all my soul!” asseverated Mr. Lanter.

Miss Minota blushed a dull red all over her immense face, as she met the young man’s rather ugly, candid gaze. Then her large china-blue eyes brimmed over; she pulled from her pocket a cambric handkerchief as large as the mainsail of a toy yacht, and began to cry like a thunder-cloud.

“Don’t!” begged Mr. Lanter. “Please don’t! If you’re angry with me I don’t know what I should do. I don’t, indeed!” He was dreadfully in earnest, and quite pale, and large drops stood upon his forehead, for the air in the Musée was insufferably hot and close. There was a smell of charred wood and blistering paint, and the unsettled dust of the place made the straggling rays of daylight that bored their way into it seem blue and smoky. A sudden clamor of voices broke out below, almost under the stage it seemed, and then came the trampling of feet, the crash of broken glass, and the smell of some spilled chemical mingled with the grosser odors of the place. The scent, the stir, the sounds, seemed vaguely associated in Mr. Lanter’s mind with something dangerous and sinister. But he was listening to Miss Minota.

“I ain’t a mite angry,” said the giantess, giving her overflowing eyes a final dab with the handkerchief, now crumpled into a damp ball. “I should hate to have you believe it! I—I think you’re real generous, an’ kind, an’ noble. And I shall be grateful to you all my life”—she mopped her eyes again—“for makin’ me feel—for once—

like I'd been an ordinary-sized girl; for I—I'll own I have fretted considerable. But there, when things can't be altered, anyhow, it's no good frettin', is it? An', of course, there could never be nothin' between us—I couldn't ever play it so low down on a man that's as generous and kind as you are, as to say there could be. But I'm just as obliged. And now I'll say good-bye, and if we don't never meet again you're to remember I was grateful. My land! I do believe the show's afire!"

For the crackling, blistering heat that parched the flooring underfoot, with the sudden volume of smoke that rolled upward, betrayed the condition of things no less than the thin tongues of flame that licked upward between the boards. In the regions under the stage the conflagration had broken out; they heard the shouts of the stage-hands, the crash of glass fire-bombs breaking one after another, and next moment a solitary man, smoke-blackened and red-faced, burst upward from the regions below, and, rushing to the fire-hose, coiled like a brown snake against the bare masonry of the wall, began to haul it down. As the man tugged and swore at the hose, other voices shouted and other feet clattered, and half a dozen other men, singed and blackened like so many demons, emerged as the first had done, from those conjectural lower depths.

"It's no use—no use!" they shouted as they ran, and the fireman dropped the hose and ran with them. They did not have to cross the charring, blistering stage, for they were on the right side for the passage-way. They fought and struggled, shrieking, in the narrow exit, blocked by their terrified bodies.

"Come! Didn't you hear?" shouted Mr. Lanter. He caught Miss Minota by the skirt and tugged at it like a faithful terrier. "Run!" he shouted again. But a chok-

ing volume of smoke, a blast of fiercer heat fanned up from below. The boards of the stage were now in flames. And the flames were of beautiful, ravishingly-delicate shades of blue and hyacinth and orange-red. And they devoured where they licked with a deadly greed and a purring, crackling kind of satisfaction. . . . "Come!" Mr. Lanter shouted again. The giantess had sunk upon her knees, he shook her violently by the shoulder, and she lifted her large, terrified face and staring blue eyes, now for the first time upon a level with his own.

"I dasn't!" she cried. "The floor wouldn't bear me—I should never git across! Save yourself while you have time!" As she sobbed and shuddered, Mr. Lanter put his arm round her, as though she had been quite an ordinary-sized girl.

"Pluck up!" he shouted, for the fire roared as triumphantly as though Kneeman's Star Musée were the choicest morsel in the world. "I'll get you out of this or burn with you, by—thunder!" and he kissed her. The kiss seemed to revive Miss Minota, for she gasped, and struggled to her feet, and looked with him upon a wall of rejoicing flame that soared upward between them and the passage-way. "These doors behind us—where do they lead?" Mr. Lanter shouted, and Miss Minota shouted back, "To the dressing-rooms!"

There was no way of escape before them; the iron curtain walled them in. As the slim greedy tongues of fire began to lick the boards on which they stood, they retreated to the back of the stage. But the stifling smoke and the greedy fire followed them, and the end of things seemed not far off. . . . It seemed quite natural now that they should be holding hands. They were blackened both, and smoke-begrimed, parched and giddy with the terrific heat, and the incandescent air fanned on their

smirched faces as though the wings of Azrael had stirred it; but they were a comfort to each other. To be heard by each other in that fiendish tumult of insentient things was impossible; but they pressed close to one another like children in the smoky dark, and held one another's hands.

"I don't know as I'd choose to have things different," said a grip of Mr. Lanter's; and the answering squeeze of Miss Minota's large hand said, "Thank you for helping me to die so like an ordinary-sized girl!" But the hand she pressed seemed to melt in hers and slip away, and, groping downward in the dun-colored smother, the giantess touched the senseless body of Mr. Lanter lying at her feet. And then she gave a cry of love and grief and anger mingled, as an ordinary-sized woman might have done—and lifted her lover from the blistering floor as though he had been a baby. The smoke seemed less dense a few feet beyond where she stood, and, moving forward with Mr. Lanter held upon one arm, the other outstretched gropingly, Miss Minota bruised her knuckles against a wooden door. It was the high, narrow door of solid, iron-clamped timber (usually situated at the back of the scene-dock), by which scenery and the more bulky properties were hoisted up to or removed from the stage of Kneeman's Musée. In the joy of the discovery Miss Minota cried out. Then she laid down Mr. Lanter very gently on the floor, and fumbled for the door-bolts. But the door opened by a winch and lever, and Miss Minota fumbled in vain. A chill despair seized her. He lay so helpless and inert at her feet that he might have been dead! "O Lord!" Miss Minota prayed, "where's the use in You havin' made me so much bigger than other folk if I can't save him? Help me to do it, and I'll never go back on You by grumblin' at my size any more!"

A dizziness overcame her, she reeled and staggered against the side wall of the scene-dock, bruising her knee against something that fell with a dull, reverberating crash. It was a solid bar of iron used by a professional athlete in a weight-lifting exhibition, and it might have weighed a hundred and sixty pounds. The crash of its fall brought Miss Minota to herself. She stooped, and found and lifted it, and exultant, for the first time, in the stature and the strength that marked her out and set her apart from her ordinary-sized sisters, the giantess attacked the door. One battering blow from the weapon wielded by those tremendous arms, and the hinges started and the stout planks split; a second, and a plank crashed splintering outward; a third, and a shout went up from the crowd assembled in the street below, as, amid volumes of escaping smoke, the begrimed and fire-scorched figure of Miss Minota appeared, carrying the insensible body of Mr. Lanter in her arms.

* * * * *

"Well," said Madame Lanter, the Colossal American Marvel, some months later, to an interviewer specially despatched from the office of the *Boston Magpie*, "I guess you know what happened after that!" She blushed a little, being yet a bride, and coyly turned her wedding ring, a golden circlet of the dimensions of a baby's bracelet, upon her colossal finger. "We brought him to, and then *he* brought it off. Flesh an' blood is flesh an' blood, an' we all have our weak p'int!—and if I did lay out never to marry a man as I couldn't look up to—I guess it would take half a dozen of my size, standing on each other's heads, to equal the loftiness of Mr. Lanter's mind!"

The young man thus eulogized presented to the reporter's view a spare and rather undersized personality,

plain of feature, and awkward of manner, drawbacks afterward transmuted by the magic touch of the stylographic pen into "*slightness, unpretending elegance, and unaffected simplicity. The beaming affection discernible in the glance he turned upon his stately bride justified the eulogistic terms in which that lady spoke of her husband. Their brief but thrillingly romantic courtship, with its strikingly sensational 'dénouement,' created a 'furore' when detailed by the New York press. The disinterested nature of the attachment of Mr. Lanter (who is a member of one of our oldest New England families) to the superb specimen of American womanhood who bears his aristocratic name may be gathered from the fact that the marriage ceremony was some weeks old before Mr. Lanter discovered that Mrs. Lanter had amassed, during the period of time spent by her in exhibiting her personal developments in the principal cities of Europe and the States, a fortune of ninety-five thousand dollars.*"

And in this final statement the stylographic pen distilled pure truth.

HOW THE MISTRESS CAME HOME

THE avenue of lofty elms was veiled in a white fog; upon the low-lying parklands, cropped meadows, and sere stubble-fields, the same woolly vapor lay dankly. But the square windows of the fine old Tudor manor-house flashed with ruddy light, and the hospitable hearth-fires of the hall diffused glow and radiance through open doors. Sir Vivian and Lady Wroth were coming home after a honeymoon of eight months' duration spent in scampering over the face of the habitable globe; and the village was in a state of loyal ferment over the advent of the lord and lady of the manor. Already the local band, heavily primed with home-brewed, was posted at the station in readiness to burst into the strains of "See the Conquering Hero" upon the arrival of the London express. Eight sturdy laborers, in clean smock-frocks, waited, rope in hand, for the opportunity of harnessing themselves to the bridal brougham, while Venetian masts, upbearing strings of flags and fairy lanterns, testified to the strength and temperature of popular good-will.

"A sweet pretty creature, 'm, I hear!" said Mrs. Ansdey, the white-haired, handsome, black-silk-clad housekeeper to the Rector's wife, who had driven up to the house to ask for a cup of tea, and leave a parcel addressed to the new mistress of the manor, containing three dozen very raspy cambric handkerchiefs, hemmed and initialed by the Girls' Sewing Class at the National Schools.

"Quite a picture, Sir Vivian's valet said!" added the butler, who was comparatively young, not being over sixty, and therefore looked down upon by Mrs. Ansdey from her vantage of fifteen summers.

"Beauty is grass!" said the Rector's wife, who was not overburdened with the commodity. She was a long, thin, high-nosed woman, with color distributed over her countenance in little islands. She drank her tea, and toasted her large, useful feet at the glowing wood-fire, and praised the Sally Lunn.

Her reverend partner was down at the village reading-rooms, rehearsing the shrill-voiced schoolchildren in the "Greet Ye To-night, Thrice Happy Pair," chorus from *Lohengrin*. She knew the quality of the cocoa to be obtained there, and longed to share with him the hospitable burden of Mrs. Ansdey's silver tray. But as this amicable division of spoil was manifestly impossible, the Rector's wife consoled herself by making a clean sweep. And so she ate and drank and chatted to the not displeased Mrs. Ansdey with unflagging vigor, while the famous Reynolds portraits of departed ladies of the manor smiled and simpered from the shining paneled walls, and the gray-muzzled bloodhounds, last of a famous race and favorite of the last Baronet, snored upon the leopard-skin hearthrug.

"You have had many visitors this season?" queried the Rector's wife, with a calculating glance at the donation box, the contents of which went to the Cottage Hospital twice in the year.

"Troops of them," returned the housekeeper, nodding her lace lappets. "And, as usual, half of 'em with American twangs. Even if they didn't talk through their noses, I should guess 'em from the States, shouldn't you, Mr. Cradell?"

"Without doubt, ma'am," rejoined the butler. "There's a feverish anxiety to get the greatest amount of information in the shortest possible time, and an equally ardent determination to finger what isn't meant to be fingered, price what can't be priced, and buy what isn't for sale, which, to my mind, is a trademark distinguishing the bearer, male or female, as hailing from the other side of the Atlantic."

"Even if he didn't call me 'marm'—if he's a man and middle-aged, and put American dollars in the box instead of English half-crowns if he happens to be a lady," continued Mrs. Ansdey. "But what I will say is, if it was with my latest breath, that the young ladies are most elegant and have a real appreciation for old and what you might call romantic things," she added somewhat hastily; and the Rector's wife said, as she added sugar to her fourth cup:

"The new Lady Wroth is an American, I have always understood."

"Born in Washington, but educated in Paris," said Mr. Cradell, putting a fresh log of apple-wood upon the glowing fire at the lower end of the hall.

"She comes of a fine old family, we have always understood," said the housekeeper, smoothing her lace apron with her plump white hands. "Rutherford her maiden name was, and with her beauty and her jewels—for her late papa was a Senator, besides being what I've heard called a Railway King—she created a sensation when she was presented by the Duchess of Balgowrie last May but one."

"As to her style of good looks," said Mr. Cradell, dusting lichen from his coat, "Sir Vivian was always partial to dark beauty. 'What is she like?' says he to me when I took the liberty of asking, as an old servant may. 'A

black pearl, Cradell, and I hope to wear my jewel in my bonnet as my ancestor Sir Guy wore Queen Elizabeth's ruby—until the day I die!' He'd a light in his eyes when he said it, and what with love and happiness and all, he looked more like a boy of twenty-three than a man of forty. And I said to Mrs. Ansdey, 'If ever there was a love-match,' I says, 'Sir Vivian's is one.' And now the carriage is waiting at the station to bring home both the master and the mistress—bless them both!"

"She wrote to me from Mentone," went on Mrs. Ansdey, "and I truly call it a pretty thought, and a gracious one, of me that have been my master's nurse, and held him on my knees when he picked out bounding 'B' and curly 'Q' with an ivory crotchet-hook." She produced from a morocco pocketbook, of solid and responsible appearance, a letter written with violet ink on thin, foreign paper, in delicate upright characters. "*'My husband has told me of all your faithful service and true devotion to him and his,'* she read; *'and I hope before long to take your kind hand in mine and thank you for him and for myself!'* There now!"

"Gracious and graceful too," said old Cradell, who had beaten noiseless time to the reading of the young mistress's letter with one wrinkled finger on a withered palm. "Good breeding there—and old blood—in every line!"

"And she looks forward to seeing her husband's dear old English home," went on the housekeeper, "and prays God to give them many days in it together—and I trust He will!"

"Let us hope so, for all concerned!" said the Rector's wife, who resented theological references as trenching upon her own particular province.

"Though in this family it's been like a fate, or a doom,

or whatever you might please to term it," said Mrs. Ansdey, "that the course of true love, the deeper it was and the truer it was, was always to be broken—not by change or faithlessness of one that loved, but by the hand of death. There was Sir Geoffrey and Lady Euphrasia—hundreds of years back—that were drowned crossing the ford on the ride home from their baby's christening and the baby lived to be Sir Launcelot, whose bride was carried off by the Black Death before the roses on her wedding garland were withered. . . . And then there were Sir Alan and Sir Guy, who were both killed in battle within a year of their weddings, and Sir Vivian's great-grandfather, old Sir Vivian, found his young wife dead at her tapestry-frame when he'd crept up quiet to surprise her with his unexpected return from the Embassy to Rome. And Sir Vivian's own dear mother lived but a very few years after the dear child came to comfort her for his father's early loss. But time goes by, and the curse—if it be a curse, as they say it is, brought upon the founder of the family for some secret deed of evil—the curse may have passed over, or worn itself out. What's that?"

"What's what, ma'am?" asked the butler, as Mrs. Ansdey rose in her rustling silks and made a sign for silence.

"I fancied I heard a timid kind of tap on the hall door," said the housekeeper.

"A robin blew against it, perhaps," said the butler. "They're stupid with the frost."

"There was a footstep too," said Mrs. Ansdey, holding up her hand and making her old-fashioned rings gleam and twinkle in the firelight. "At least, if there wasn't, Mr. Cradell, I admit I've been deceived!"

"We'll see, we'll see!" said Cradell, moving to the

great oaken door. "It may be a tramp." The handle turned, the massive oak door moved inward. The fog had thinned, it had grown clearer beyond doors. Within the frame of the massive lintels appeared the glimmering stone steps, a segment of the formal garden, with its black Irish yews, pale marble urns, and cartwheel beds of late flowers, enclosed within borders of box. Beyond the trees reared a somber barrier, shutting out the sky, and the chill wind of winter drove the dead leaves in swirls and drifts across the melancholy picture. The Rector's wife, thinking of her walk across the park to the Rectory, sniffed and shivered, and the housekeeper motioned to the butler to shut the door.

"For I was mistaken, as you see, and there's not a living soul about, unless it's skulking in the shadow of the trees," she said. "Another cup of tea, or a drop of cherry-brandy, ma'am, to keep the bitter air out as you walk home? Though there's no reason you should walk when there's the pony-chair. . . . Or perhaps you would rather——" She started. "Call me nervous, or finical, or what you like," she said, peering anxiously through her gold-rimmed spectacles in the direction of the door. "But, if I spoke with my dying breath, there was a tap, and then a pause, and then another tap, as plain as plain could be!"

"Dear me!" The Rector's wife, alarm in her eyes and crumbs on her chin, rose from her chair, dropping her imitation sable boa. "I really believe I heard it too! . . . Had you not better——?"

Cradell shook his old head and clucked softly with his tongue. "The ladies must always have their way!" he said, shuffling on his neatly polished shoes toward the hall door. He opened it, and both the housekeeper and

the Rector's wife uttered a simultaneous exclamation of surprise.

For a woman was standing in the moonlight outside. She was of slight form, and wore a wide-brimmed feathered hat, and the heavy shadow of the portico fell blackly over her, so that she seemed no more than a silhouette with a pale glimmering background. But a delicate perfume stole upon the senses of those who, from within, looked out at her, and when she moved there was the unmistakable frou-frou of silken linings.

"Ma'am!" the butler began.

"I came on before," a sweet plaintive voice said—a voice that was viola-like in its rather thin, but sweet and vibrating quality. "And you must be Cradell."

"*Ma'am?*" the old servant said again, while the Rector's wife and the housekeeper listened with strained anxiety.

"I am Lady Wroth," came in the clear, vibrating tones. "I came on before. . . . It does not matter why. There was a slight accident between Greystoke Station and the Elvand Tunnel. Do not be alarmed. Sir Vivian is safe, quite safe," she went on, as agitated exclamations broke from the three listeners. "Indeed only one person was killed, though two or three are injured, and he—my husband—is helping the sufferers. He is always like that, so ready to help, so full of sympathy. . . ."

She was now standing in the firelight, whose ruddy glow illumined the slight figure, and drew gleams of crimson and emerald from the jewels at her throat and shone in the depths of her great dark eyes. Her face was of delicate, pearly paleness, her hair had the tints of autumn leaves, and her draperies, too, were of the tints of autumn. She drew off a glove, and her wedding ring, with its diamond keeper, showed upon the slight and

pretty hand, as her traveling mantle of velvet trimmed with costly sables fell to the floor.

"Oh, your ladyship!" cried the housekeeper. "What must you think of us—standing here and staring? But as goodness sees us—what with your sudden coming, and the news about the accident, and all—we've lost our heads, me and Mr. Cradell!"

"So very alarming!" said the Rector's wife. "I trust Lady Wroth will excuse what may seem like an intrusion——"

"The intrusion is mine," said the sweet viola-voice. "I should have given warning of my coming, but it was not to be. Oh! the dear house!" She looked with wondering, shining eyes upon the paneled walls, the trophied arms, the noble pictures, and the quaint antique furniture, and between her lips, of the faintest rose, her delicate teeth gleamed like pearls, as her breath came quick and eager. "Vivian's old home . . . Vivian's home, and mine!" she whispered to herself, and laid a hand upon her heart, as though to check its beating.

"I will not intrude," said the Rector's wife. "I will hope for the pleasure of calling, with the Rector, at a more fitting time. Good-night, Lady Wroth."

The Rector's wife had held out her large hand in its cheap glove, but the new mistress of the manor only smiled upon her with vague wistful sweetness, and did not touch the massive extremity. Whereupon its owner set down Lady Wroth as "proud," and made a mental note to tell the Rector so, as her large feet carried her out of the house and out of the story.

The two old servants exchanged a glance as the slight figure of their mistress moved across the polished floor, strewn with Oriental rugs and skins of wild beasts.

"Would my lady wish to go to her room, or to have

some refreshment in the dining-room?" the housekeeper asked.

My lady declined.

"I have no need of anything. I only wish to rest a little and see my husband's home before starting upon a journey," she explained.

"A journey? Dear, gracious me! And your ladyship just fresh from travel, and shaken by an accident and all!" cried Mrs. Ansdey, shaking her lace lappets.

"I am so used to travel," said her ladyship, "though this is the longest journey I have ever taken—or ever shall take!" She smiled upon the two old people, and settled herself in the seat she had chosen, and resting her elbow upon the arm of it, and her pretty chin in her delicate palm, let her sweet shining eyes travel about the place. "All as he described it, yes!" she whispered to herself. "The mullioned windows with the coats of arms, the carved and painted ceiling, the hooded Tudor fireplaces, the arms and the pictures. . . . That is the great Gainsborough portrait of Sir Alan's young wife, the girl who died of grief when they brought her husband's *bâton* of Field Marshal to her—won an hour before he was killed in battle. There is the painting by Velasquez of the Wroth who was made Bishop of Toledo. That must be the Vandyck of Lady Marjorie with the deerhound by her side, and there is the Watts picture of Vivian's young mother playing ball with her boy. Ah! what a sweet, sweet child!"

The plaintive voice thrilled and trembled. Tears might not have been far from the shadowy dark eyes, as Lady Wroth rose and moved to the foot of the great staircase, attended by the housekeeper.

"Shall I show you your rooms, my lady?" Mrs. Ansdey began. "The fires are burning beautifully, and every-

thing is quite ready, and I feel sure your ladyship must need rest after——”

“I will rest presently. But what I wish now, is to be shown the house, if you are not too tired. Lady Audrey’s turret, and the paneled chamber where Sir Roger fought the duel with the Spanish cavalier, and the bedroom where Queen Elizabeth slept, and the banqueting-hall and the chapel where the Templar’s heart is buried under the altar, and the gallery where Lady Euphrasia danced with King Henry VIII., in masquing dress, and the whispering corridor, and the painted room——”

“And the ghost-chamber, my lady? Oddly enough, that’s the first room that American ladies ask to see! . . . But maybe your ladyship doesn’t believe in ghosts, or the fact of its being late and getting dark——”

Lady Wroth laughed quietly and sweetly. “Do you believe that the spirits of those who have passed on can only appear in the dark, dear Mrs. Ansdey?”

The housekeeper rustled her stiff silken skirts as she followed her new mistress up the broad staircase with its carven balusters and mossy carpets.

“I don’t believe in ghosts at all, my lady!”

“Not in ghosts as they are commonly imagined; those shadowy white things that point and scare and hover,” came floating back in the thin, sweet tones; “but in the spirits of the departed—it may be long-dead, or newly called from earth—who borrow for a little while the semblance in which they lived and loved, and return for one last look at a beloved home, or come for one dear glimpse of what might, but for the Infinite Eternal Will, have been a home. You believe in them, do you not? Or, if you do not now, you will! Ah, yes! you will, dear Mrs. Ansdey!”

Looking upward from the hall, the butler saw the

slight figure of Sir Vivian's bride traverse the first landing and pass out of view, followed by the portly figure of the housekeeper; and in that moment came the grind of wheels upon the avenue, a loud knock at the hall-door, and a sharp peal at the bell. Two liveried servants, appearing in haste, admitted the master of the house, and at the first glimpse of Sir Vivian's ghastly face and torn and disordered garments, Cradell cried out in alarm.

"Sir Vivian—sir! It's worse than what my lady said! . . . You've been hurt! Shall I send for the doctor?"

"He is with us!" came the hoarse reply, and Cradell, peering out into the chill, gathering darkness, saw a strange carriage drawn up before the door, whose lamps threw a yellow reflection on the clouds of steam rising from the flanks of a pair of jaded horses. They were busy about the door; something was being lifted out? *What?* asked the old servant's shaking lips dumbly.

"Drove in from Greystoke . . . hospital carriage. . . . Send the men to help. . . . Get me some brandy," came from Sir Vivian in hoarse shaking tones. "I can't . . . my arm . . . dislocated, that's all. I wish to Heaven ——" His face expressed the nature of the wish, and the old butler cried with spirit, as he brought the brandy from the dining-room. "You should be thankful, sir, that you've been spared to her!"

"Spared to—her?"

The decanter clinked against the glass. Sir Vivian set it down upon the tray, and turned a white, seamed face and haggard eyes upon Cradell.

"Spared to my lady, sir, God bless her!" the old servant said. "Your hand shakes sadly; let me pour the brandy out."

Sir Vivian laughed, or made a grimace of laughter, showing his teeth and stretching his pale lips.

"Lord, sir! don't look like that!" Cradell begged. "Think if her ladyship were to see you! She——"

"If her ladyship were to see me!" repeated Sir Vivian. He drank off a glass of brandy and laughed again. "Cradell—are you mad, or am I?"

"Neither of us, sir, I hope!" said Cradell. Then a light broke upon him, and he cried, "Good gracious, Sir Vivian, is it possible that you don't know . . . my lady is here?"

"I know it." An awful agony was expressed in Sir Vivian's face. "I know it too well!" Great drops stood upon his forehead; he turned aside, clenching his hand, and fighting for self-command.

"She came half an hour ago," began the butler. "Me and Mrs. Ansdey were quite took aback. Mrs. Ansdey is upstairs with her ladyship now. . . ."

"Man—man!" cried Sir Vivian, "do you know what you are saying?"

He turned his streaming face upon the frightened butler and gripped him by the arm, fiercely.

"Lady Wroth—my wife, she is dead! There was an accident—she was killed instantaneously, with little pain, thank God! They said so at the Greystoke Hospital. . . . She is outside—there!" He pointed a shaking hand toward the partly open hall-door, through which a pale line of moonlight came stealing as the careful, measured tread of men carrying a precious burden sounded on the stone. "Yet you say to me—she arrived half an hour ago! You are raving—or I am delirious!"

For answer the butler pointed to the velvet mantle trimmed with costly sables that lay upon the floor.

"It's heaven's truth, Sir Vivian! And there lies the proof! . . . and here is Mrs. Ansdey to confirm it."

Both men looked up as the portly figure in its rustling black silken robes hurried down the great staircase.

"Sir Vivian! Oh, welcome home, Sir Vivian, a thousand times!" The housekeeper's face was very pale, her hands worked nervously, crumpling her fine lace apron. "But something dreadful has happened! it's written in your face!" she cried, "and God forgive a sinful woman, but I am beginning to believe that I have spoken with a spirit!"

"Cradell tells me that——" Sir Vivian made an upward gesture.

"It's true," cried Mrs. Ansdey. "Her ladyship—if 'twas her ladyship—explained that you were delayed. Someone was killed in the railway accident——"

"Someone *was* killed!"

"And you were coming on after you had seen to the wounded. . . . She—she would not eat, or drink, or rest; she wished—all she wished was to see the house, and I obeyed, and we went through room after room until—there was a ring at the hall-door bell, and a knocking, and I turned to speak to my lady as we stood together in the painted chamber—and she was gone! Oh, Sir Vivian, what does it all mean?" cried Mrs. Ansdey.

"It means—that!"

As the hall-door opened to admit the bearers with their precious burden, and as the men laid that cold, lovely, smiling image of Death reverently on the settle, the bloodhound wakened from his slumber and rising, uttered a long plaintive howl.

"Welcome home, my wife!" said Sir Vivian. "Now please to leave us here together!"

So the servants and the bearers withdrew.

"It was the same face!" Mrs. Ansdey whispered, as her faithful old comrade led her away. "Why did she come?"

Cradell said: "Because she'd made up her mind to—and she was a woman! There's two answers in one!"

He stooped mechanically to pick up the sable-trimmed mantle that had lain upon the floor. No hand had touched it, but it was no longer there.

THE MOTOR-BURGLAR

A DEVELOPMENT OF THE AGE OF PETROL

A QUITE remarkable case of coincidence, dear fellows—a parallel without precedent,” said Hambridge Ost to a select circle of listeners in the smoking-room of the Younger Sons’ Club, “is that the giant plate-burglary successfully accomplished at Lord Whysdale’s shooting-box in Deershire on Tuesday last by a party of three polite persons traveling in a large, roomy and handsomely-appointed pale blue ‘Flygoer’ automobile, was echoed, so to put it—on Friday by a colossal robbery at the seat of my cousin, Lord Pomphrey; the defrauding persons being also, in that case, a trio of civil-spoken and well-dressed strangers, occupying a light-green ‘Runhard’ of twenty-eight horse-power with a limousine body and singularly brilliant nickel fittings. The *most* remarkable point on one side, and one which has given cause for the noisy derision of the *profanum vulgus*—do you follow me?—being that Lord Pomphrey—I regret to add—assisted and abetted by the humble individual now speaking, actually assisted the thieves to get clear off with his property, includin’ an Elizabethan beaker with a cover, out of which the Virgin Monarch graciously quaffed a nightcap of the cordial called ‘lambswool’ when staying at The Towers during a Royal progress in the year 1566, and a silver tea-kettle and punch-bowl presented by the tenants on the late Earl’s coming-of-age, with a cargo of other valuables, out of which I had the

melancholy privilege of rescuing one Queen Anne Apostle spoon.

“My cousin Wosbric, between attacks of his hereditary gout, is an ardent golfer. Residing at his Club during the absence of Lady Pomphrey and the family in the Tyrol, he takes every feasible opportunity of cultivating his skill and renewing his enthusiasm for the game, the intricacies of which, dear fellars, I may own I have never been able to master. To me, when a large, cheerful, whiskered man, dressed in shaggy greenish clothes, with gaiters, announces, rubbing his hands, which are invariably encased in woolen mitts, that he has *taken his driver twice going to the twelfth hole; did not altogether mishit either shot, and yet was not up to the green, because the wind bore down like a Vanguard omnibus*;—to me nothing wildly incredible or curious has been said. The large man in the shaggy clothes is talking a shibboleth I do not and never could understand, dear fellars, if I bent my whole intelligence—considered by some decent judges not altogether contemptible—to the task, until the final collapse of the present Social System. But, nevertheless, Lord Pomphrey is partial to the company of this humble individual upon his golfing days, and to me the Head of my House—d’ye foller me?—in mentioning a preference issues a mandate. Enveloped in a complete golfing costume of Jaeger material, surmounted by two fur-lined overcoats, the pockets of the under one containing two patent ‘keep-hot’ bottles of warm and comforting liquids—coffee and soup—which aid to maintain the temperature of the outer man at normal, before being transferred to the inner individual—I manage to defy the rigors of the English climate and support the exhaustion consequent upon indulgence in the national game of North Britain. My walking-stick is convertible into a camp-

stool; the soles of my thick boots are protected by goloshes, a peaked cap with flaps for the ears crowns my panoply; and, place in the mouth of the individual thus attired one of Dunhill's 'Asorbal' cigarettes, each of which is furnished with a patent hygienic mouthpiece-filter which absorbs the deleterious oil of nicotine, and catches the stray particles of tobacco—d'ye foller me, dear fellars?—which otherwise find their way into the system of the smoker—and the picture is complete.

"The run by road from the Club doorsteps to Cluckham Pomphrey, where the Fargey Common Golf-links equal any that our country can boast, faithful copies of the eighteen best holes in the world having been carefully made under the supervision of Lord Pomphrey—the run can be made within four hours. We started. I had received the Fiery Cross from my kinsman, so to put it, in a laconic note, running: 'Golf to-morrow if the weather keeps up and the gout keeps down.—Yours, Pomphrey.' We started in a mild drizzle, at six-thirty. Our car, a 'Rusher,' of twenty-six horse-power, with a detachable top and glass driving-screen, behaved excellently. Driving through Cluckham, our county town—it happened to be market-day!—we accidentally converted a lamb into cutlets; but the immolated creature, as it chanced, being the property of one of my cousin's farmer-tenants, the casualty passed over with fewer comments than generally ensue. Bowing to several well-known yeomen and county land-holders, my cousin and myself alighted at the Pink Boar, kept by an old retainer of the family, took a light but nourishing ante-luncheon or snack of a couple of raw eggs beaten up with whisky, and proceeded on our way to the Fargey Common Links.

"A mile from The Towers, whose picturesque battlements could be descried, dear fellars, embosomed, as it

were, in surroundin' trees, we encountered some motorists upon the road in quite a regrettable plight. Their car, a large, light green 'Runhard' of twenty-eight horse-power, was drawn up by the roadside;—quite an arsenal of tools glittered in the wintry rays of the sun, spread out upon an india-rubber sheet, and what had occurred was plain to the meanest automobiling capacity. A tire had exploded after a long, stiff climb of the steep hill, a notable feature in our county landscape—the descent of which we were about to negotiate. And the spare tire, after being attached, had proved to be leaky beyond repair.

"Fellar-feeling, dear fellars!—would have moved any fellar of you to foller our example. We raised our hats, the three strangers in the 'Runhard' car politely returning the salutation; we offered aid, and met with grateful acceptance. Larger than our own locomotive—the 'Runhard' wheels were of exactly the same diameter—the 'Runhard' tires were 'Fridolines,' like our own. We offered our spare tire, it fitted to a miracle. We were overwhelmed with the grateful acknowledgments of its three polite proprietors.

"'You will at least permit me to pay for the tire!' pleaded the gentleman who appeared to take the lead. As Lord Pomphrey refused, with the courtly wave of the hand that distinguishes this thirteenth wearer of the coronet, he continued: 'For you do not know—you never can know!—how inestimable a service your lordship has rendered us!'

"Wosbric was known, then. He elevated his eyebrows in polite surprise. Not being able to discern the features of the strangers behind their cap-masks and goggles, he could not recall ever having met them before. Then the second polite stranger, who was even more polite than the first, explained in a slight American accent the reason of

his companion's recognition of Lord Pomphrey. 'We have, like many other tourists,' he said, 'recently enjoyed the privilege of going over your lordship's antique and noble family pile. In the hall, the feudal stateliness of which especially appealed to me as an American citizen, hangs a portrait of your lordship taken, in company with a gold-hilted sword and a red velvet curtain, as Lord-Lieutenant of the County.'

"Lord Pomphrey bowed. 'As Lord-Lieutenant of the County,' I put in. 'Quite so. The likeness is agreed to be a striking one. And as you have viewed the other treasures of The Towers, I presume you did not miss the large oak cabinet of Jacobean silver plate—magnificent and unique as having belonged to Queen Anne of Denmark—which stands at the end of the smaller library behind the large Chinese screen?'

"The polite strangers looked at me and then at Lord Pomphrey and then at each other. A cloud passed over the bright intelligent eyes that shone through their motor-goggles as they sorrowfully shook their heads.

"'We missed that cabinet!' said the first polite stranger, with a sigh.

"'I guess we did!' said the second.

"'Just like wot I calls our beastly, blooming luck!' sighed the third stranger who was sitting in the car, and who, though polite, was not in the least a refined sort of person. As all three of them seemed unfeignedly depressed, Lord Pomphrey, who is the soul of hospitality, begged them to return to The Towers, accept refreshment, and examine under his personal superintendence, the magnificent contents of the oak cabinet in the second library.

"'We thank your lordship profoundly!' said the first

polite stranger, bowing, 'but we are unable to accept your invitation!' He bowed again, and got into the car.

"'And we shall never cease to regret, I guess,' said the second, 'that we have missed the most valuable item of your lordship's collection of silver heirlooms. But we have garnered many precious momentos'—it struck me at that moment that there were a great many waterproof-covered bundles in the 'Runhard' car, and as he spoke he patted one of these affectionately—'of our visit to this country which must serve to sweeten life for us when we are far away. And with these we must endeavor to be content!'

"He too bowed, dear fellars, and got into the car. The machinery began to splutter at a touch upon the lever.

"'Let 'er rip, Cocky,' advised the third stranger; 'we ain't got none too much of a start with this yere tire a-busting. So long!' he said, and like an arrow from a bow, so to put it, dear fellars, the large, light green 'Runhard' leapt forward and was out of sight in an instant. We proceeded in the 'Rusher' toward our destination.

"Presently, dear fellars, we met two large, hot, county constables on bicycles. They did not recognize us, so great was their haste. Their large boots vigorously trod the pedals, their bulky, blue-uniformed figures were crouched over the handle-bars as they pounded up the hill from Cluckham Pomphrey. We wondered whither they might be going? We questioned what agricultural breach of the peace, what local felony, had spurred them to such an unusual display of energy. We found out.

"For at the next bend of the road, dear fellars, we encountered quite a little cavalcade of hot and red-faced, or pale and panting persons. The steward from Pomphrey Towers in his T-cart, the head bailiff from Pomphrey Towers on his cob, the coachman driving a light

gig with two armed grooms on the back seat, an excited mob of stable-helpers and gardeners straggling along behind. . . . Even before they recognized us, those in the van of the pursuers shouted to us, asking if we had passed an automobile upon the road—a large, light green ‘Runhard’ containing three men?

“In a few gasped sentences, dear fellars, the ghastly truth stood revealed; the facts were laid bare to us. Pomphrey Towers had been, to employ the expression of the bailiff, ‘cracked and burgled,’ only an hour previously, of a quantity of silver articles and a mass of valuable plate. Lord Pomphrey and myself had met the burglars upon the road, had supplied them with the means of continuing their flight, had entered into conversation with them, and returned their polite farewells.

“We joined the pursuit, all thoughts of golf submerged in the bosom of Lord Pomphrey, beneath the boiling lava-flood of rage and indignation. To be robbed is bad; to be placed in the position of confederate to the robbers, unknowing aider and abettor of their nefarious flight, is maddening. The three polite individuals in the large, light green motor-car have not, up to the present, been traced. One small spoon of the Apostle-headed kind, found by the roadside where they replaced their own deflated tire, with that so generously bestowed upon them by Lord Pomphrey, is the only clue so far.

“A distressin’ experience, dear fellars!—confoundedly so in the estimation of this humble individual. Thanks, I *will* take another of those long Dutch cigars and a Scotch, with Hebinaris’—the new mineral water, do you foller me?—with iridescent bubbles that snap at your nose. My love to you, dear fellars, and a Happy New Year!”

THE LOST ROOM

THEY were going to part at last—to separate quietly, but formally—after a married life of nearly three years.

There was no Other Woman, even she was quite sure of that; there wasn't even the shadow of another man. He rather wished there were, with a good solid six-foot personality to project it. He was so confoundedly tired of conjugal life.

He had an old historic title, a large estate unencumbered by the prodigalities of ancestors, unhampered by his own. She had inherited from an American mother a large fortune and some of the biggest jewels Tiffany had ever set. Their tastes were similar, their constitutions robust, their tempers strong and healthy, their temperaments ardent and enthusiastic, their moral and mental temperatures since the last decisive meeting between the trustees of her property and his family lawyers had been slowly descending to normal. Never, oh, never would either of them put their heads again, they were determined, into the noose of marriage! even if a *decree nisi* should ever make it possible. Because naturally, as time went on, she would meet somebody she liked, he thought. . . . Because men were so constituted, reflected she, that if a woman only told one of them often enough that he was in love with her, he would begin to believe it.

They had used up all their capability for passion, devotion, and so on, during their romantic wooing, their

short but divine engagement, and the incandescent eight weeks' honeymoon that had followed the wedding. They wanted to forget the world then, and be alone together; and they got what they wanted, one April, one May, in that great old granite-built pepper-box turreted Scotch mansion on the banks of the silver Tweed.

It was heavenly, or at the very least Paradisaical. They wanted it to be quite an old-fashioned honeymoon, so they did not go down by motor, but by the Euston express. Ten hours of traveling, and then they got out at a little gray station of a little Scots town with a dreadful tweed-factory in it whose dye and grease terribly defiled the silvery river reaches, and does so to this day—and drove through lovely woods of larch and birch and hawthorn, just breaking into green leaf, to Maryhouse, the cradle of the race from which she sprang, the unhappy lovely Queen—whose great wrought gates of rusted iron, with the Stuart shield of arms in faded gold and crimson and blue, would never be unlocked again until a Stuart should reign once more upon the throne of England.

The great avenue had been turned into park, and you reached the house by the lesser way. It had a square courtyard, closed by another pair of great wrought gates, and bears with ragged staves were on the pillars, and even held up the antique scraper at the low-browed door, and the knocker was the tiniest bear of all. There were no rooms to some of the four hundred casements that winked out of the lichened walls. You pulled the bear-handle of the house-bell, and it clanged up high out of sight somewhere among the twisted chimneys and the great slants of stone-tiled roof studded with pinky house-leek and gay with yellow moss.

Then the low, square, iron-studded door had opened,

and two people had gone in, to commence, among the tragic relics of vanished, forgotten existences, their own new life together. Perhaps some sorrowful shadow of failure and disillusion had fallen upon them from those old gray walls. A week before they went there a piece of paneling had fallen from the wall in the great hall, revealing in a niche behind it a skull, and what else Time had left of the man who had suffered such a tragic ending.

As I have said, the Deed of Separation had been formally signed by both parties, their trustees and lawyers. She was beautifully free. She sang a little song as her motor-victoria ran her homeward to the house which he had no right to enter now, and she ordered the touring limousine to be at the door very early in the morning before she ran upstairs.

She was as gay as possible. She told her maid, as she hummed the "Dream Waltz," to have a cabin trunk and a bag packed. Only these, because she would be back in a week. She was only going to visit some old great, quiet people in an old great, quiet house up North, who had been very fond of society in their time, but now never even dressed for dinner. She meant the fair murdered Scots' Queen and the Kings who had dwelt at Maryhouse, of course.

"Fancy that, my lady!" said the maid, thanking her own stars that she was not to accompany her mistress. Many silken calves and much company above and below stairs constituted the waiting-woman's ideal of Life.

Well, the itinerary of the Great North road—that would take too long. Behind the glass screen she sat, swathed in her sables, while the taciturn, clean-shaven chauffeur made England spin by. She chose her own road, the collieries were left behind in their smoke, the

ruins of St. Oswald's Chapel of Ease were passed, standing gray and battered on their battle-site. Serving-shields, where under the enchanted hall sleep Arthur and his Knights, she saw before she lost the vision. She slept at Carlisle, and went on next morning to Peebles, where Needpath elevates its single fang above the salmon pool.

And so to Maryhouse, not even a telegram having been sent ahead of her. She knew her dear friends, the owners of the place, were still abroad. But there was always Mistress Dumphie, the old, old lady-housekeeper, who had been born and reared and wooed and married, too, at Maryhouse. Mistress Dumphie would take her in for a night, and if not—there was an inn in the ugly little weaving village. The great limousine rolled through the gates of the smaller avenue and over the bridge of the Arbalestiers Tower, and stopped before the great, rusty crowned gates of the sunny courtyard.

The larks were singing. The Quhair brook ran under the hazel-banks. Oh! what sweet quiet after the roar of Paris and London and the dust of the roads.

The rusty chain was pulled, the great bell clanged on the side of a pepper-box turret ever so high overhead. Mistress Dumphie, in her morn's merino and black net cap, appeared behind the rusty grille.

"Guid preserve 's a'! It's the young lord's leddy!" she said.

The "young lord's leddy" came in. She was to stay. The chauffeur went back to the hotel.

"I feel as though I should find something here," said the "young lord's leddy," "something that I have lost somehow. It is very odd!"

She wandered about the beautiful old house all the rest of the day.

"Here is the great oak window-seat where we used to sit together. Here is the little stone parlor where we quarreled and made it up. Here is the vast tapestried chamber, with the faded Stuart portraits on the walls, that was my bedroom; and this smaller room, with the acorn-shaped stone mullions and the ebony and tulip wood furniture, was *his!*"

What fine days they had spent in those daisied avenues, under those huge oaks. What wet ones under the old painted, diapered ceilings. The wettest of all they had spent in looking for the Lost Room.

The Lost Room was a chamber that everybody knew of, but nobody ever discovered. Counting from outside, you could be sure there was an extra window, but go where you would about the hushed mysterious house, you never opened a door that led into the Lost Room.

She supped in a little dining-parlor that those dead Queens had used before her. She went to bed in the tapestried room. She slept well and woke in the middle of the night with a great bell clanging in her ears. She could not sleep after that. Lights flickered before her shut eyes in the darkness.

"I *did* hear a step on the staircase! I *did* hear the shutting of a door!" she said to herself, and got out of the great bed on the dais and put warm slippers on her white little naked feet, and threw on a dressing-gown lined with unborn Persian lambskin—such a cruel idea, you know, but very fashionable. And she took her electric torch, and unlocked the door noiselessly, and stepped out boldly into the wide, dusky corridor.

She trod upon something soft, and repressed a scream. She held the light downward and picked up a man's dog-skin glove.

"Ah, now I know that I am dreaming!" she said quite

cheerfully. She need not be afraid of mice or rats, because she knew that she was all the time lying in bed in the big tapestried room. As for ghosts, she wanted to see one frightfully—always had.

The door of the room that had been his was just opposite. Something made her go in, on her noiseless dream-feet, carrying the dream-glove in her hand. The dream went on quite as dreams usually do. She had gone back to the sweet old half-forgotten honeymoon time.

“This is the night on which we had tiffed, and I was the first to make it up!” She smiled and went in. It was just as she had expected. There he lay, fast asleep in the big tapestry-hung bed.

She went up to the side of it, and pulled back the curtain without waking him, and sat down, shading the light from the dear, handsome, manly face, and devouring it with famished eyes. This was what she had come seeking; some glamour of the old time; some sweet remembrance unspoiled by anything that had happened since.

The jars, the disagreements, the quarrels had never happened. . . . She was back in the old times, and he was not yet regretting his lost freedom, but tightening the bond a little closer every day by words and deeds of love.

This was the Lost Room, this dream-chamber where he lay. She was glad to have come down to Maryhouse for this. Who would not take a journey to find your old self and your old self’s self at the end of it, and Love lying sleeping in the shadow of dear memories, ready to be wakened with a kiss?

She stooped and gave the kiss. He started and awakened. He stared at her, and the light of the old joy leaped into his eyes.

"Alice! You're only a dream, I know, but it is better than the real Alice, who grew to hate me. Oh! put your arms round me again! let me have your heart on mine again; let both of us forget what a ruin we have made of the life that we set out to make so sweet and fair!"

He caught her hands. The torch fell with a crash, and went out. The dark was full of light, and warm, throbbing memories, and they were one again. Just for a little while, only in a dream. . . .

But day came through the diamond casements, laughing, and hand in hand with Hope. There were tears and laughter in her train. Two real people. No dream after all.

He had wanted to look at Maryhouse again, and had traveled down in the express from Euston, hours after she had started. It was he who had rung the bell in the night.

Mistress Dumphie had let him in and given him supper, and lighted the old room for him. He had thought there was a curious twinkle in her eye.

The Deed of Separation, now waste-paper, may be had on application, by any young, wealthy couple who are desirous, upon a sensible arrangement, to part.

FATHER TO THE MAN

Being a Confidential Letter from the Right Hon. Viscount Tynstone, at the Rev. O. Gotobed's, Eton College, to the Lady Mary Cliffe-Bradlay, 000 Wessex Street, Park Lane, W.

GOOD OLD POLL,—

It is awfully nice of you to be so fritefully sick about it—*i. e.*, my Getting Swished this Half, but fellows get Hardened to these things at School. Hemming major says there is something in a rotten poetry-book about a Divinity that shapes our Ends. I expect the beggar who wrote it was trying to get round the Head for his own Reasons. Your simpathy about the Ladies' Plate is cum-forting, but the Eton Eight must give other Crews a chance sumtimse. So everyboddy says, and as far as stile went our Fellowse boddies were better under controle, and the whole Appearanse of the Rowing was up to the best traddishunse of Eton. No. 7, Biggly-Wade, presenting a beautiful example of rithm and elastissity; and Henson No. 4, simply being a Tower of strength. N. B., he is Captain of my Tutor's and Has licked me awfully several timse, so I am in a pusion to Judge.

While the Thames Cup was being slogged for I made up my mind to Sacrifise myself for the good of my Fam-maly, and drop into Lunch with Mr. and Mrs. Le Moser, those Millionaire Friends of Mother's, who she said were such Howling Cads, and so anxhus to know me. They Had an A.1. Motor-Launch, sedar-built, with plated fittingse and with salloons 4 and aft, and Green Awnings

second on the Bucks side 2 Private Lawns billow the Kingston Rowing Club. There were Moundse of Flowers, and though lots of other awfully smart launches filled up the First Section of the Bank before the Houseboats Began, where you, and Mother, and the Girls were on Uncle Todmore's *Roulette*, the Le Moser craft collared the bikker for sumshuous splendor. Regger minor of my house, who is quite an awfully Brilliant umorist, made an eppigram about the general Swellness of boats and launches billonging to people like the Le Moser's. He said: "On the Berks side there are piles only, and no Booms. On the Bucks side there are *both* Boomse and Piles."

Regger was so awfully Pleased with himself for saying such a clever Remark that I Had to Kick him to Tone Him down. He is Fritefully litterary and Artistic, because his Father Has just Bought a Weakly Illustrated Journal, and He is to Eddit it when He leaves Oxford; and the Things he said about the akwatic Fairy Palaces bineath the Pine treese and the Green-clad Hilly Vista, kombining to make up a Picture uneek in its English beauty, and without Paralel in the sivilised World were like hearing bitts read out of some Rotten Newspaper the day after the Rigatta.

I had Not Had much Brekker, bicause our Boys' Maid is quite awfully spoons on Henson No. 4 of the Eight, and forgetse where she has Hidden the Knives and Forkse to kepe Other Fellows from getting at Them. I Found them in my Cricket Pads after I had Eaten eggs and Sausages with my Fingers like one of those Pre-historick Beggars with Stone Hatchets. So the Hospitallity of the Le Mosers was ixtremely Welcome. Mrs. Le Moser was Frightfully Civil. She Had Diamond buttons on a White Reefer Jacket, and Rows and Rows

of pearls as big as Sparrows' eggse. A White Gangway, railed with gilt chains on posts with gilt Knobs, led to a Markay on Shore, which was Decorated as a Medievil Banqueting Hall, and there was a Footman in the Le Moser livery behind everybody's chair. The Dalmatian Band and the Castillian Minstrels Played, and it was an awfully ripping lunchon, with everything you could think of to Eat and Drink and lots more bissides. There were 4,000 Pot plants on Board, and when it Got Dark the Fairy Litse looked awfully fine.

Mr. Le Moser was a ripping good Host, though his waistcoat and necktie were frightfully loud, and he wares his Nails as long as the front ends of a Pair of Swedish Skates. N. B., Perhaps it is to Rake in the Money with? He told me that my Distinguished Father's Name was Down as One of the Directors of His New Company, and that He Hoped to have Mine in a Few Years. He said the Risponsibilities of Rank were fritefully tremendous, and never seemed to Notice how I kept Slogging into the Champagne. He told me to keep the Cigarretts biside me, and offered me a Partagga in a glass case, price 8s. 6d., which I expect comes to a frightfully big price for a box of 100. I acsepted the luxurious Weed, but Did Not Smoak it. (N. B., I have got it now, and Regger, who has been swotting Pericles this half for English Classics, calls it "a glorious casket stored with ill." I can't think what makes him.)

After everybody was stodged we went on Board the launch, and Miss Le Moser—Mother is quite rite about her being a pretty girl, though her Pater and Mater are such awful form, and her Pater doesn't know how to stop talking about the money he has Bagged on the Stock Ixchange, and in other Places, the Diamond Mines in South Africa particularly. A chap in the Guards who

was on the launch said it was a well-developed case of I. D. B., but Forgot to tell me what the Letters ment. He said, "Josie would carry the pile" (Josie is Miss Le Moser), and that if I was a sensible young beggar, and not a rotten Ass, I would see where my own advantidge lay even before I left School for Sandhurst. He went on about an infusion of Radical blood being a good thing to mingel with the ancient Tory blue, and rather Valuable than otherwise to one's descendents, and said that to win a young and distinctly decently-looking wife with a hundred and eighty thousand jimmies in her wedding nightcap would be getting the Grand Slam in mattrimony. I cheeked him a bit and asked him if he had Praktised what he jolly well preached, and he twisted his mustash and said: "Unfortunately, no, young 'un; as like a Good many other fellows, I Came under the Married Women's propperty Act before I was eighteen."

Then he pointed out a weedy, long-legged Beggar with the ghost of a red mustash and fritefully swagger clothes, who was making himself tremendously nice to Josie Le Moser, and said he was the Son of Mr. Joyd Lorge's privite Secretary and an *enfant gâtây* of the Liberal Government, with a seat in the Lower House being kept warm for him until he should come of age, and a lot more, ending up by asking me if I was driving an Automobile and saw a Dog trying to Bite through one of my Tyres, what I should do to the dog? I said I should Drive over it, of course, which seemed to please him frightfully, for he tipped me a sov, and then winked towards the Fellow who was showing his teeth at Miss Le Moser and said, "Then, there's the Dog, don't you know!" and went off to talk to a frightfully swell woman who called him to come over to her. I should rather like to be like that Guardsman when I go into the Army.

His name is Gerald, for I heard the lady call him by it; he is Lord Dennismore, and he was so jolly Respectful and attentive to the lady, who wore quite a lot of vales and had heaps of golden hair, though she was quite old, and a tremendously red and white Complexion, and a front figure that rinkled and bulged when she stooped or sat down, that I thought she must be his Mother, until Mrs. Le Moser told me she was the Duchess of Rinkhorn and his great friend. What I said about the Duchess being his mother seemed to amuse Mrs. Le Moser like mad, for I Heard her tell quite a lot of people, and they All yelled, as if I had been trying to be funny, which I was Not.

She told me lots more About Lord Dennismore, which made me feel beastly proud of his having talked to me, and given me Advice. He was out with his battalion in the South African War, and did splendid thingse at the Front, and got speshally mentioned in Despatches, after Jaegersfontein and for Rescewing twenty wounded Tommies who had fallen in the Grass which the liddite from the shells had set on fire—I think it was liddite. And he got potted in the Shoulder, and was getting quite fit again, and would have done a lot more fiting if the Duchess hadn't come out in a Speshul Hospital ship and carried him back "to England, Home and Duty," as a lady who was listening to Mrs. Le Moser put in. I think it was jolly mean of the Duchess, don't you? As if a chap could be properly grateful for being muffed like that! I forgot to say that Lord Denismore, when a little chap, was Father's fag at school, and used to field for him when stump cricket in the passage in wet weather first came in. And he, Lord Denismore, was picked to Play in the School Eleven when he was still only a Lower Boy, and was Captain for a half before he left. And I

feel awfully Glad I met him, but I wonder why he said that about coming under the Married Women's Property Act before he was eighteen? There is a Duke of Rinkhorn, who goes about in a Bath Chair with a Nurse in a white cap and apron to feed him and blow his nose when it wants it, so Perhaps the Duchess is the married woman he meant after all.

I must say Josie Le Moser seemed to like me talking to her and explaining things more than she seemed to when the weedy chap with the ghost of a red mustash was trying to. After the phinal of the Diamonds, when the Crowds began to thin, and later when the Twilite came down and the Nats came out, and the Le Moser's launch and their markay were elluminated up with about twice as many Fairy Lites as anybody else had, and the Castillian Minstrils played splendidly on their mandalins, I began to think her an awfully pretty girl. I don't believe it was the crème de Menth her Pater had made me have with my coffy after Lunch and the Champagne, or the Russian rum they sent round in little dekanter, with the five o'clock tea, because the fellows say my Head is frightfully strong. But I got her hand and squeezed it a lot of times, and whenever the sucking M. P. edged a word in, and he tried to keep in Josie's pocket the Most of the time, I wanted to fit him, and I think He guessed it from my Manner. He let Out He had been Edducated by Private Tutors at Home because his constitushion was dellicate as a Boy, and I said "Oh!" and I think Josie began to feel him rather in the way after that. His name is Wenham-Biggs, and I xpect his Constitushion is giving him a lot more trouble by now.

The thing happened like this. I had only leeve till 7.30, but Mr. Le Moser asked me to stop and Dine, and I thought I could work the squash at the Station, and being

three tranes late for an extra 2 hours so consentid with thanx, as it is a Poor Heart that Never rejoices, as Regger says. Josie and Me were up in the Bows where there is just Room for 2, and Wenham-Biggs was sitting on the Steersman's Box rubbing his chin against the Wheel, to make his Beard grow I suppose, and Getting more Sickeningly Sweet and Centimental in the things He was saying to Josie every Minute. I call it Nerve to go on like that with another fellow nearly as old as yourself listening to every Word. At last he Said he was ready to Die for the Woman he Loved—I like that, don't you?—Whenever she asked the sacrafice, and I said it would be the Leest he could Do, if she had an objection to a red mustash. It must be being so much with Regger makes me bat off these Things I xpect. Wenham-Biggs was perfeckly wild, and Josie giggled so mutch that she Forgot she was Close to the Edge and the Rubber mat slipped or something, the Launch being polished like a Looking Glass, and she went plump into the River, and it is pretty Deep on the Bucks side, and there is a good deal of Streem.

I was Glad of all the Swimmers I had gone in for at Cuckoo Weir. I was Beestly sorry about my Swagger Flannelse and my new colors I had sported for the 1st time; but of corse I had to go in after Josie and thogh I don't suppose I showed much skill, People made an awful Row, crowding to the Bullarks, and throwing life-boys and cork fenders at us like ennything. Mr. Le Moser kept offering rewards in lbs. and making it ginnies, and Mrs. Le Moser had histerries in Lord Dennismore's arms, which shows she was not quite unconshus because He was the best-bread and best-looking man of the Launch-party.

What price your Little Brother when Me and Josie were Hauled up into the Launch all over pslime and

Duckweed. Everybody Shook Hands with Me and said things that Made me Tingal all Over, and all the Women kept kissing Josie who they took away and put to Bed. Mr. Le Moser lent me a Change of his Thingse. O crumbs! if you Had seen me in them ispeshally the Wastecoat and the etsetras with stripes down the Legs. And he rote me a letter to Take back to my Tutor, and left it ungummed. And the things He said about my Pluck and Daring and his Eternal obligation made me feel quite Shy when I read them going back in the last trane. There were two other Lower Boys in the carriage, and besidse them, a Fellow of my house who is One of the Swells of the Sixth Form, who was awfully annoyed at being obliged to travel with us.

The Butler was sitting up for us at my tutor's, and everyone Else in Bed, as it was past 12, when we Got Back, but beyond a Slite Cold in my Head the Risults of the Outing were Not Paneful, my Letter putting Things in an awfully good light, which made the Other Fellows rather envious thogh they were let off with midling paenas.

I Forgot to say Mr. Le Moser tipped me £100, which will come in very usefull. Also I am to try and get leave to go and Spend the Day at their Place at Staines next week, and they will send me Home in one of their motorcarse. Xcuse Spelling and mistakes as my Cold is making me Sneaze pretty Frequently, and with love to Mother, and all at home.

Bilieve me,

Your loving Brother,

TOBY.

P.S.—You Never saw a Fellow with plenty of conceat and Nerve about Him look as small as Wenham-Biggs when Lord Dennismore asked Him why He did not Dive

in after Josie too, and he Had to own up He Could not swim a Stroak. What price private Tutors and being Edducated at Home?

P.P.S.—I saw Josie before I came away, and Mrs. Le Moser kissed me, which was horrid, and so did the Duchess and Several Other Ladies, and then they told Josie to and she did and gave me a little Diamond Duck to wear on my watch chane. N.B.—I think I see myself doing it and getting fitted by my fagmaster for side.

T.

P.P.S.S.—Lord Dennismore neerly rung my hand off when I said Good-bye, and said, “You’ve tumbled in for a good thing, you lucky little beggar, and I’m $\frac{1}{2}$ inclined to billeve . . .” And then he left off without saying What. But he tipped me 3 soverins more, and asked me to come and lunch with Him when Next he is on Duty, and you bet I said delighted thanks. . . .

T.

P.P.P.S.S.S.—As my Fagmaster seemed inclined to be Nasty about my not getting Up in Time to Fill his Bath and make his tost and cofy in the morning I gave Him Mr. Le Moser’s 8s. 6d. Partagga in the glass case. First he bitt the end of the case off and it neerly choaked Him, and then He had a lot of trouble in getting it to Lite, and before it was $\frac{1}{2}$ through he had a lot more trubble of a different kind. (N.B.—Ask mother if it would Not be a good Thing for me *i.e.* marrying Josie Le Moser when I am of Age? I shall be fritefully poor and she will be awfully Rich, so her Father and Mother would not matter much. Also it would be Better than coming under the Married Women’s Propperty Act at 18, like poor Dennismore!)

TYNSTONE.

THE FLY AND THE SPIDER

Being a Confidential Letter from the Right Hon. Viscount Tynstone, on board the Yacht "Spindrift," Cowes Roads, to the Lady Mary Cliffe-Bradlay, Silversands Park, Sussex.

TUESDAY, August —.

GOOD OLD POLL,—

I thought you were Rotting about Lord Dennismore and the Duchess at the baginning of your Letter, but your Locking him up in the Peech House was a Stunning Lark. The Duchess must Have been in a Regular Wax, and He must have been Fritefully Wild, only you can't Hit a Girl, they are so Soft and Go down so Easily.

Uncle Todmore Has the Usual Yacht Party for the Rigatta, and the old *Spindrift* looks A.1. painted white with a new Copper Rail and a New Sett of Lifeboyse, etc. I asked Uncle Todmore How Much it had Cost, and He Heeved a Sigh, and said sufficient to the Day was the evil Thereof, so I xpect it comes to a Lump, and He and Aunt Honoria will Have to spend the Winter down at that Beestly Place of His in Devonshire instead of Going to the Riviara or Egipt this time.

I said He Had the Usual Party on Board; but there are Two New People—a Captain Clanarthur, late of the Malta Artillery, a Man who Parts His Hair Down the Back, and Wares a Gold Braselet on his Left Wrist, and his Wife. Mrs. Clanarthur is a simply Fritefully pretty

woman, with Long Black ilashes that Curl at the endse, and Eyes you Cant tell the right Colour of, never Being the Same Twise Running. Aunt Honoria is a Great Friend of Hers. And she Wares a Silver Belt with her Ruff weather Serge Gown that was a saint Bernard Dog's Collar—so you may immagine How Small her waste is. She says I am a Mear Boy, and Ought Not to Notice Such Things; but I shall be Sixteen in September, and lots of Our Fellows at My Tutors are in love. Greening Minor, Who is a Regular Shrimp, regularly rites verses To the Barmade in the Slough Station refreshment room. First class—I mean the Refreshment Room, not the Verses. One Poem bigins—

“How Nobly Does Thy Fair Form Tower,
Whenare I Gaze On Thee.
I Wish thou Wert a Lilly Flower,
& I a Hunney Bee.”

Which is Not Half Bad for a Lower Boy. And Regger is Secretly ingaged to his Sisters Jerman Guverness, who is 30 if a Day. She Has Promised to Wate for Regger, who is a Year Older than Me, and simply awfully Divoted to Her. She Makes Splendid Gingerbred with Nuts in it, which will come in Usefull if Regger's Pater Cuts Him Off with a Shilling.

Mrs. Clanarthur's Christian Name is Ermengarde, but Her Friends call Her Nini for short. The Divise on Her Note Paper is a Gold Spider in a silver Web, and she Wares a little Broach with a Diamond Spider in a Gold Web. She keeps on Telling me she is Not Young, but That must be All Rot, because She is so mutch moar Girlish than the 2 Girls on Board. They are the Pope-Baggotes, and Lady Jane is Fatter than ever.

WEDNESDAY.

I can't Immajin Why Mrs. Clanarthur ever married such a regular Scug as Captain Clanarthur, though she Says she was a mear Child, and did It to Pleease Her Family. They have been 10 Yearse married, so if she was so young at the time she cannot be as old as she says she is. She says she Had Her Hair Done up and wore Long Skirts For the first Time on her Wedding Day, and thought more of the Cake and the Presents than what was to Come. She cried when she Told me that, after dinner on Deck, when an Italian Opera Fellow, whose Name I can't spell, was singing Love songs to the Acompaniment of the Mandolin, and the Starse were shining more Brightly than I ever remember to Have Seen Them. Her Hair has a Scent like Violets, and when Her Head Comes Near you it makes you Feel Hot and cold and Swimmy — at leest it does Me. Clanarthur was Away Racing a Yawl of His at the Royal Portsmouth Corinthian Yacht Club Rigatta, and I thoght if He should Get Drowned what a Jolly Good thing it would Be. He Ought to be Kicked for Making that woman so frightfully wretchid when She is 10,000 times Too Good For Him. N.B.—Of course She did Not Tell me what he has Done, but I bet you $\frac{1}{2}$ a crown it is sumthing Beastly caddish.

I think the Men on Board a Not very Well Bred Sett, as they chaff Me like mad about Mrs. Clanarthur; and even when she is Within Earshott, which makes Me want Frightfully to Kick them all Round. I Cannot Sleep at Night as I used to Do, and my Head Aches in a Beastly way in the Morning. I have got a handkerchief of Mrs. Clanarthur's I Stole when She was Not Looking, and I Keep it Under My Pillow at Night and Switch the illeetric light On and Look at it every Now and Then. There

is "Nini" imbroidered in the Corner, and it Smells of Violets, like her Hair. If I was married to a Lovely Woman like that I should not be a Beast like Clanarthur. She Told Me that she Never has suffered Him to Kiss her on the Lips Since She Knew Him to be Unworthy of a Pure Woman's Love. Sumhow I am glad of that, thogh it is Rough on Clanarthur.

SATURDAY.

Last Night Sumthing Happened I am Now Going to tell you about. They were Throwing Coloured Lites on the Sea from the Victoria Pier, and all the Big Steam Yachts Had Fairy lamps Hung Out, and the Music of the Bands and things Comming Over the Water quite made it simply ripping. It was after dinner, and I was Sitting on Deck with Mrs. Clanarthur, and She thought She would like a Moonlight Pull in the Yacht's dinghy, as the Sea was so Beautifully Smooth. So I tipped two of the *Spindrift* men to get the boat reddy, and not say ennything to ennybody and We Started. There was a Fritefully Stiff Tide on. I Rowed Her Round and Down a Lane made of Torpedo Gun-boats on One Side and 1st Class Cruisers on the other, All Reddy for the King to inspect on Saturday. It was Ripping Fun, and Nini was Delighted. Then we Drifted dreemily along Towards Ryde, and I Forgot there was such a Fritefully Stiff Tide Running out to Spithead because I was Holding Nini's Hand—she let me—and thinking there were Worse Things than Coming under the Married Women's Property Act after All.

When We Had got a Good Distance Out I found I could Not Get Back For Nuts, However Hard I Pulled.

The Perspirashun was Running off me like Water and my Arms Ached like Mad. Nini—she had said I might call her Nini the Evening Before—Nini Could not See

ennything was Wrong, but I knew we were being Carried Out to Sea at About 100 miles an Hour and it Kept Getting Darker. N.B.—Of course, I did Not Care For myself, but I Kept Thinking of Nini. She said the Poetry of the illimittible Oshan made Her Trill like a Smitten Lute, and I said, "Does it?" and Kept Slogging Away against the Tide without making 1 Not in 1,000 Hours, as the Signals in Coes Roads kept getting Smaller. Then a Southampton Liner came Rushing out of the Dark. I Saw Both her Port and Starboard Litse as I Turned my Head, so she must have been Coming Straight down on Us. You may Suppose I had Fits, thinking of Mrs. Clanarthur, and I would have tried to Shout, but I Had Lost my Wind completely.

"How pretty," said Nini—Mrs. Clanarthur I mean—"that must be the *Campania* for New York from Southampton." And she went on Gassing about the Beauty of the Seen without an Idea that we might be cut in 2 Next Minute. But we got off. The liner swerved to port and went by us lighted up like a sea Alhambra, all her deckse crowded with People and her Band Playing 'The Merry Widow,' and Clanarthur lost his chance of being a Merry Widower. But she passed so jolly close to us that a lot of Wash slopped in, and Nini screamed and called out, "You silly boy, it's all your Fault!" which I like, considering the sittuation. And She Pulled her White Evening Wrap round her and said, "Let's get back to the yacht; it's shockingly cold and the sea is getting abominably Rough!" And then I had to own up what a jolly Hat we were in, and that we had been steddily Drifting Out to Sea for Some time Past.

What price me? I felt small enough to get into a cricket-ball case already, but I felt something worse when Mrs. Clanarthur Boxed my Ears. She said I was a Little

Idiot, and that she had been culpably Reckless to allow Me to Take Her on the Water, and what would Freddy say? Freddy is Captain Clanarthur. So I said I would stand up to Him with or without Gloves, Fight Him with Rivolverse across a necktie if he liked, and that He could Divorse Her afterwardse and then she could marry me, and everything would be jolly well settled all Round, as she Had Told me He was aborrent to Her only the night before when she kissed me under the Aft Awning three Times—which she Had Done, though she called me an untruthful little Retch for saying so, and then she had Histericks, and then what Uncle Podmore calls the Mal-lady of the Wave came on, and I had to ship the oars and Hold Her Up, and she was Awfully Bad. Mother on the Turbean xing to Boulogne was Nothing To it. I am not Joking When I Tell You that We Drifted About in That beestly Dinghy all night at the immanent Risk of Being Run Down by anything from a Tramp Steamer to a Government Crooser, and if the Tide Had Not Turned, which it did at 4 o'clock in the Morning, we should be as dead now as Two People can be.

O crumbs, when I looked at Nini, who After jawing at me till she was Tired Had Gone to sleep with Her Head on my Shoulder! By the Glimmaring Light of Dawn she Looked as Old as Aunt Honoria, and not Half as Nice. Her Swagger Evening Gown and Mantal were Ruined with Seawater, and one Long Tale of her Lovely Hair was Washing about in the Bilje at the Bottom of the Dinghy, we had shipped such a lot in the Night. Her Forhead and one Eye were nearly Hidden by a Top Piece with curls that had come off, though there was lots of Hair underneath it, and she was Perfectly Blue with Cold and Fright.

I thought she must have been Pretty Old when she

Married Captain Clanarthur after all, and when I Remembered how mad I had been about Her, and how I wanted to Snipe Clanarthur and Marry Her, I felt awfully sick at having been such an unlimated ass.

She woke up and called me some more Names and then a Pilot cutter came along bound for Portsmouth Pier, and I Haled the Pilot and He agreed to take us back to Cowes Road for £1. And they Hawled us on Board because we were too jolly stiff to clime up the cutter's side and we Got back to the Yacht in Time for Breakfast.

You may guess if the men of the Party chaffed me Before how frightfully they chaff Now, I am Roasted about the Beastly Business from morning till Night. Uncle Podmore told me they had sent out 2 Boats to Find us and burned blue Lights. All Captain Clanarthur Said when He saw Mrs. Clanarthur come up the yacht's side like a Ragbag, was, "So there You are, are you?" But suppose he is Lying Low to bring an Axion for Diverse, do you suppose I shall have to marry Mrs. Clanarthur?

I do jolly well Hope Not. She is old enough to be my mother, and Has a Perfectly awful temper.

Fancy me being as Pleased as a Fox-terrier with 2 tails when she let me Kiss Her under the Deck Awning after dinner. Fellows with lots of good sense can be asses at times.

Of course I tell you All this in Confidence on the Strict Q.T., because you are Not like other Girls about Keeping a Secret. There is a Big Review of the Home Fleet and the Swedish Squadron by the King to-day, and the Fleet will be elluminated in the Evening after dinner, and there will be Fireworks from the Victoria Pier. But whether it is my having been Out all Night with Nini—I mean Mrs. Clanarthur—in that rotten Dinghy or something else I don't ixactly know, but I feel jolly miserable.

I wish Greening minor was here, it would do me Good to give the little Brute a regular licking. Fancy him Being in love with a Barmade and writing her verses. And Regger, who has the nerve to make up to his sister's Jerman Governess. I can't think why Fellows do such idiotic Things.

I Think rather than Have to marry Mrs. Clanarthur I would Run away and be a stoker like that Fellow in the newspapers. She looks quite young again this afternoon and her Hair is beautifully done, but I keep on seeing Her as she was at 4 this morning, when that pilot-cutter Found us.

I am getting rather sorry for Clanarthur tied up to a Woman who Boxes a Fellow's ears and calls him Names for Nothing—that is, I should feel sorry for him if I was quite Eesy in my mind about his bringing an Axion for Diverse.

Ever your affeckshionate Brother,
TYNSTONE.

FOR VALOR!

THE City of Smutborough was holding a solemn public function in honor of one of her sons. Formerly a soldier in the Smutborough Regiment, he had won his V.C. a long time back in the early days of the last South African War. At the conclusion of hostilities, having, like many other men, attained perfect competency and ripe experience with the expiration of the age-limit, Color-Sergeant Stoneham was naturally shelved as being of no further use to the nation, except in an emergency like the last.

The rear of the Town Hall, Smutborough, formed one side of an unsavory blind alley: a dingy *cul-de-sac* blocked at the end by the high, sooty, spike-bordered wall of what was termed, with mordant but unconscious humor, the Workhouse Recreation Yard. The Workhouse loomed large upon the opposite side. Though the great main entrance for misery was in another street, a solid oaken door, hospitably garnished with large nails and a double row of bristling prongs, exhibited upon a mud-splashed fanlight above it the black-lettered legend, "Casual Ward."

It was only one o'clock, and the door would not open before seven, but a queue of deplorable applicants had already mustered before it. A tall, upright, gaunt man of about forty, dressed in a weather-stained jacket-suit of tweed, and wearing a shabby deerstalker low over his haggard eyes, had been one of the last to attach himself to Poverty's kite-tail.

Against the wall of the Workhouse Recreation Yard was the excuse for a considerable expenditure of public

funds at a moment felt by the humbler citizens of Smutborough to be extremely inopportune. The excuse was let into the sooty brick masonry. It made a queerly-shaped bulge in the middle of an oppressively new Union Jack which covered it, and upon each side of this tantalizing mystery stood a large, pink, shining police-constable, in the largest size obtainable of brand-new white woolen gloves.

At the bottom of the blind alley were more constables, ready in case of the mob of unemployed making a rush round from the front of the Town Hall. But at present it surged, a human sea lashed to fury by the whip of hunger and the voice of Socialism, in the square outside the long row of first-floor windows where the sumptuous luncheon was laid for a hundred guests.

"A'a'ah! T'ss's! Ya'-'aah!"

"Close up here, close up!" A police-sergeant, hurrying from the bottom of the alley, herded the struggling queue before the door of the casual ward into a compact bunch. Then the rearward portals of the Town Hall, before which a red-and-white striped awning had suddenly sprouted, were thrown wide. A crush of rosetted stewards, carrying very shiny hats, preceded the Mace-Bearer; the Mayor, a plump and rosy personage, in his furred robes and chain of office, appeared, walking between a lovely lady in sumptuous sables and an accurately-attired gentleman, whose intense vacuity of eye, mechanical bow and smile, and inability to utter anything without being first prompted by an attendant secretary from behind, denoted him a Personage of the first importance. . . . The Sheriff followed with the Mayor-ess, the Aldermen and the guests trooped after. And the mob at the other side of the Town Hall, making a charge round the corner, and being repulsed by the police, vented

its indignation in such an outburst of boo's that the Mayor's speech was delivered in dumb show. Everybody clapped when he had done, though. Upon which the Personage, prompted by his attendant spirit, delivered himself in short, House of Commons gasps of the contents of a Be-ribboned roll of typoscript. The last sentence was audible: "And let this! Be a perpetual Reminder to this! And succeeding generations! How our! Mother country! Rewards her! Heroic sons!" Everybody clapped and applauded the Personage. The Personage, then, advancing upon exquisitely-polished boots to the Union Jack with the mysterious bulge under it pulled a white cord with a lavender kid glove, and brought the flag down, revealing a square block of Caen stone bearing some sculptural figures in low relief set in the masonry above a neat little drinking-fountain. Then the Personage, the lovely lady in furs, the Mayor and Mayoress, Sheriff, Aldermen, guests, and stewards trooped back into the Town Hall to luncheon, and the crowd surged back again to boo the banqueters. But after the last of these had, under a cross-fire of gibes and taunts, taken himself away, the turbulent ocean of humanity rolled back into its foodless garrets and cellars, and the Socialist leaders who had urged on the ring-leaders retired to dine at a hotel. Subsequently the alley behind the Town Hall became gorged with homeless persons seeking shelter for the night, and when seven o'clock struck and the Casual Ward door opened, one rush of misery packed it instantly from wall to wall, and Stoneham, V. C., late Color-Sergeant in the Smutborough Regiment, found himself shut out.

He wondered, as he ruefully felt in his empty pockets, whether it would end in his having to sell the Cross? He had never failed to raise money on his reserve-pension

when the General Brushmaker's Union had forced him to come out with the other men, because a non-union *employé* had been taken on at the factory. Since then he had navvied, stoked, scavenged, done everything and anything that a capable man might do to get bare bread and common shelter for himself and his. Now the wife was in Clogham Infirmary with two of the children, and another was dead of clemming, and . . . and the old wound from the cross-nicked Mauser bullet pained him horribly. He was giddy and sick with starvation, and the world was spinning round. . . .

Just in time he caught at the edge of the new drinking fountain, and saved himself from falling. The grudging glimmer from the fanlight over the door of the Casual Ward showed him something that roused him as a swooning man may be roused by a splash of icy water in his face. It was his own name in shining gold letters, boldly incised upon a handsome tablet under the sculptured block that jutted from the sooty brick wall.

"Lord above, what's this?" gasped the man whom Smutborough had that day toasted. He struck a match, the last he had, and read, beneath the bas-relief which represented the city's hero in the act of shielding a wounded officer with his body from a supposititious volley of Boer bullets:

TO COMMEMORATE THE GALLANT ACTION
BY WHICH COLOUR-SERGEANT H. STONEHAM,
OF THE SMUTBOROUGH REGIMENT,
AND A NATIVE OF THIS CITY,
WON THE VICTORIA CROSS.

IN ACTION, PAARDFONTEIN, TRANSVAAL, SOUTH AFRICA, 1901.

"Move on, you!" said the voice of a police-constable behind him. And Stoneham, V.C., drove his freezing

hands deep into his ragged pockets, wheeled and obeyed.

"It's a rum world!" He reeled a little in his gait, and whispered thickly to himself, as if some of the champagne and grub that had been consumed that day in his honor had got into his head by proxy. "Damned queer from start to finish! But, in the long run, I'm a bit better off than the bloke in the Bible. He asked for bread, and they gave him a stone. And I've got a drinking fountain into the bargain!"

And the wet night swallowed him up.

MELLICENT

HAPPY is the corpse, they say, that the rain rains on," observed Mr. Popham, "but knowing his rheumatic nature, I could have wished him a drier day. However, we must take what comes, and it's curious that what comes is generally what one would have preferred to be without. Life is very like a switchback railway," continued Mr. Popham. "Now you're up, a-looking down upon other human beings; and now you're down a-looking up at 'em. And similarly your fellow-creatures as regards you. It's a curious reflection that I shan't ever measure out his colchicum again; or soothe the morning twinges in his knees and elbers with a lithia lollipop in a glass of warm water; or hear him swear when I tighten his straps and buckles; or fetch and carry his wigs between this and the hairdresser's in Regent Place. Who do those wigs belong to now? Yesterday his coffin, an extra-sized, double oak casket, metal-lined, with plated handles and silver name-plate, stood in there!" He jerked his head at the double doors leading into the bedroom. "This morning we accompanied him to Woking Cemetery. This afternoon they are a-reading of the Will in Portland Place, and Odlett gave me his solemn word that John Henry shouldn't remove his ear from the library keyhole without finding out whether a little bit on account of faithful services rendered hadn't been left to Frederick T. Popham, valet to the above. For he promised to leave me something all along, and almost

with his last breath, 'I haven't forgotten you, Popham,' says he. 'You've been remembered, you'll find, in the Will.' And . . . Lord! Was that you? What a turn you gave me, Miss Mellicent!"

"Why, you're quite nervous, Mr. Popham, sir," said Miss Mellicent.

Miss Mellicent had bumped at the door with the end of a coal-scuttle, and now apologized, bringing it in. Miss Mellicent was a thin person of some thirty London summers, dressed in a worn black gown with stray threads sticking out where crape had been ripped off. Her hair would have been a nice brown if it had been less dusty, her gray eyes were timid and kind, and her dingy pale face had a look of belated girlhood—was sometimes quite transfigured into prettiness when she smiled.

"I'll own I am a little unlike myself," agreed Mr. Popham. "Perhaps it's his luggage all ready in a pile near the door, as if we were off to a foreign Spa within the next five minutes, or going down to Helsham to stop in his usual rooms in the south wing. Perhaps it's his going off so sudden in quite a mild attack. Perhaps it's the strain of the funeral this morning, perhaps it's sympathy for Sir George and the family, perhaps it's a little anxiety on my own account! I know what he had, and I've my notions as to how he's disposed of it! The likeliest way to bring about a lawsuit and get it into Chancery would be *his* way, bless you! The embroilingest way; the way to bring about the greatest amount of jealousy and bitterness; the way to cost the most to all concerned and bring about the smallest return in the way of satisfaction and profit to 'em, would be the way he'd give the preference to over all. And if he was a-listening to me at this minute," said Mr. Popham, with a slight uncomfortable glance toward the folding doors that led into the bed-

room—"and I'm sure I hope he's better employed!—he'd own I've done him no more than justice!"

"The many years I've known General Bastling," said Miss Mellicent, "and it's going on for twenty that he's lodged with us four months in each twelvemonth—I've never asked or cared to know. Was he a rich gentleman?"

"Why, I should call him pretty snug at that," said Mr. Popham. "Ten thousand in Home Rails; a pretty little nest-egg of five thousand in Government Three per Cents; a matter of sixteen hundred invested in the Chilianmugger Anthracite Mining Company; and a nice little bit of loose cash in the current account at Cox's. That's what I've my eye on, to tell you the truth; and I don't think it's unnatural or greedy."

"I would never believe you selfish or money-seeking," said Miss Mellicent, folding her hard-worked red hands upon her worn stuff apron, "not if an Angel was to come down out of the stained-glass window in church—I sit under it on a Sunday evening sometimes, when I'm not wanted at home—and tell me so!"

"I hope I'm not naturally more of a groveler than other men in my situation—my late situation—would be," returned Mr. Popham. "But forty odd is getting on in years, and I'm reluctant at my time of life to go looking for another middle-aged gentleman to valet. The young ones are too harum-scarum and given to late hours for a man like me; and if they weren't, they'd be unnatural phenomena. A nice little inn in a country town, with a decentish bar custom and a solid bottle-and-jug department, and a cold lunch in the coffee-room on market-days, would suit me; with Hunt, Harriers, Freemasons, and Friendly Societies' dinners to cater for; and a private understanding with a few gamekeepers anxious to pro-

mote their own interests in a quiet, unassuming way—the guards of the late and early Expresses—and one or two West End poulterers and greengrocers as I have met in what I might call the butterfly stage of my existence, when I wore silk stockings and livery, floured my hair regular, wore a bookay on Levée and Drawing-Room days, and would as soon have eaten cold joint or cleaned the carriage as taken up coals. And why I haven't relieved you of the scuttle before this, is a question between me and my conscience. Let me take it and put it down. It won't be the first time, if it is the last, will it?"

"Don't, Mr. Popham, sir!" pleaded Miss Mellicent; "don't speak in that downhearted way." Her red hands plucked at a corner of her dingy stuff apron, her gray eyes were already pink about the rims. Tears rose in them. She coughed and swallowed nervously.

"The Bastling Arms is the name of that there little inn," said Mr. Popham. "The sign is the same as the crest on *his* notepaper and his seal-ring and the lock of that despatch-box." He pointed to the despatch-box crowning the pile of solid, well-used, much be-labeled portmanteaux and imperials that occupied the corner near the door of the room—a comfortably furnished, rather dingy second-floor apartment in a quiet street above, and running parallel with, Oxford Circus. "The landlord died the day before yesterday—as if to oblige or aggravate me, I don't know which!—and the widow, knowing my ambitions, dropped me a postcard to inform. Three hundred is wanted for the lease, stock, and goodwill, and fifty for the furniture, stable and yard-effects. A bargain, Miss Mellicent, if I only had the money! But as it goes, I'm a hundred and fifty short—unless John Henry's ear is tingling at this moment with tidings of comfort and joy. Now, what do you mean by lighting

a fire as if I wanted coddling, when you've a dozen people to look after, if you've one?"

Miss Mellicent was down on her knees at the old-fashioned grate, laying a fire. She struck a match and lighted the kindling, and, though it was mid-June, the bright blaze was welcome in the dingy sitting-room, whose window-panes streamed with torrents of rain.

"The gentlemen are all out but the third-floor front," she said, "and when the rain began, and I thought of you sitting up here in the dim light alone, it seemed as if I might do this much to make things cheerfuller. For you've done so much for me ever since I came here"—her red and blackened knuckles went up to her pink-rimmed eyes—"you always done so much for me!"

"For you, my dear soul!" ejaculated Mr. Popham, with circular eyes. "You make too much of things, Miss Mellicent!"

"That's one of 'em," cried grateful Mellicent, turning upon him a thin, blushing face down which two tears openly trickled. "You've called me 'Miss Mellicent' from the first. From the time I came here to Mr. and Mrs. Davis, an orphan, ten years old, in my cheap black frock, made out of the skirt of poor mother's mourning for poor father, you've always called me 'Miss.' It helped me, somehow; just as your carrying up the heavy cans of hot water and the coals did."

"You was a bright-eyed, grateful little mouse, too," said Mr. Popham retrospectively, "and many's the time I've had it in my mind to speak to Mr. and Mrs. Davis about their driving a little thing like you so hard. They're past driving now, that's one comfort! It's years since I've set eyes on either of 'em, now I come to think of it!"

"It's years!" Mellicent echoed in a slightly bewildered way. "Why of course it would be years!"

"She was a mountain, was the venerable lady, and the old gentleman was a mere lath," said Mr. Popham meditatively. "He used to answer the letters we wrote year by year, season in and season out, from the family seat at Helsham, from the Engadine, Aix, or Ems, Paris, or the Riviera, to say we were coming on such a day. Ten years ago the writing of the letters changed to a feminine hand—and since then I haven't seen him."

"Why—don't you know—he died?" said Mellicent.

"Did he really?" cried Mr. Popham. "Well, it was like him to keep it so quiet, and like the old lady, too. Reminds me—I haven't set eyes on *her* for a matter of five year and over!"

"Oh dear, Mr. Popham! she's dead too!" gasped Mellicent in distress.

"She'd be pleased to know how little we've missed her, I know," responded Mr. Popham cheerfully. "Now, quite between ourselves, Miss Mellicent, since for the first time since I've known you we're indulging in a confidential conversation—who's carrying on the house?"

"Don't you know? No—you've never asked or thought to ask in all these years," returned Mellicent. "The person who carries on the house is—not quite—but I suppose she would be called so—a lady!"

"And very sensibly she manages," approved Mr. Popham, "in keeping out of the way and letting you do it for her. And a nice income she makes, I'll be bound! Why, the house has never been empty since first I come here. Old gentlemen with ample means on every floor, toddling out to their clubs when their various complaints permit, and dining at home—and dining comfortably, too—when they don't. Such a polish on the boots, such

a crispness of the breakfast bacon, such a flavor about the coffee and the curries, such a tenderness about the joints, such a dryness about the daily newspaper, and such an absence of over-statement about the total of the weekly bill as, with all my experience, I've never found elsewhere. And all owing to You! If your modesty allowed you to think over yourself for one moment—which I truly believe you've never done since you were born—you'd admit, Miss Mellicent—that you're a wonder!"

"Oh! do you truly mean it?" she cried, with her heart upon her lips.

"I do," answered Mr. Popham, with warmth. "And if the present proprietor of the lodgings wasn't a lady—and knew what was good for him—he'd——"

"Oh no! No, Mr. Popham, sir, no! He wouldn't. No one could ever think of me in such a way!" Her red and blackened hands went up to the piteous, quivering face, and her lean bosom heaved behind the meager bib of her scorched stuff apron. "Never!"

"Tell me now, upon your honor," Mr. Popham pressed. "Haven't you never looked at nobody in that way yourself?"

Miss Mellicent fairly writhed and shuddered with nervousness. But she laughed, looking away from Mr. Popham and into the old-fashioned but handsome glass over the mantelshelf, in which, within an Early Victorian frame of fly-spotted gilding, the reflection of Mr. Popham's alert, well-featured, respectable profile and her own poor, wistful face appeared together.

"If you won't ask me no more—yes, then! but he never dreamed o' me!"

"More shame for him!" asseverated Mr. Popham stoutly. "Why, what a put-upon young woman you are, Miss Mellicent! Since you were ten years old, I do

verily believe you've never had a pleasure, never had a present, never had a friend, never had an outing—no more than you've had a sweetheart."

"Ah, but," she cried, with a happy laugh, "I have had a friend! You've been my friend, haven't you? And I have had pleasure in knowing that. And I've had an outing—twice. Once Uncle Davis took me to the World's Fair—it was my twelfth birthday—and once, two years later, you treated me to the pantomime."

"Did I? And uncommon generous and considerate it was of me, I must say, to have done that much for you, you poor little neglected, lonely creature!" uttered the remorseful Mr. Popham.

"I never forgot it," Mellicent cried, with beaming eyes. "The glory and the splendor, the living roses and the talking animals and the shining fairies, and you to explain it all and be so kind. I never forgot it! Who could?"

"Why, I'm beginning to remember something about it myself!" said Mr. Popham, clearing. "We partook of a dozen oysters and some shandy-gaff at a fish-bar on the way home. According to present views, we ought to have shaken carbolic powder over that shellfish instead of pepper, and washed it down with Condyl's Fluid; but, being behind the present times, we enjoyed ourselves."

"Didn't we!" Mellicent clapped her hands. "I have gone back to that beautiful evening in memory hundreds and hundreds of times! It has helped me through such a lot of hard things—for things are hard sometimes. Sometimes, when you aren't here, and there isn't no one to speak to on the stairs, and the gentlemen are over-particular about their boots and changeable about the hours for their meals, things get the better of me to that extent that I scream and run!"

"Scream and run, do you?" said the puzzled Mr. Popham. "And how do you do it? Or do you do it without knowing how, eh?"

"I shriek out loud and hear myself as though my voice came from a long way off," said Mellicent, opening her large eyes, "and then my feet begin to run. I scream, and I run screaming up to the little top attic I slept in when I came here as a child, where my old rag doll is still, and mother's patchwork counterpane covers the truckle-bed. And I hide my head in that, and cry myself quiet and patient again!"

"And Lord have mercy on your lonely little soul!" cried Mr. Popham. "Patient you are, and that's the truth!" He took the knotty red hand and held it in both of his for an instant, looking at the downcast face. "But don't scream and run any more. It isn't good for you!"

"I haven't screamed and runned for quite a long time now," she answered. "But"—her poor lips trembled—"I think I shall when you are gone for good."

"Nonsense, nonsense!" Mr. Popham squeezed the red hand and dropped it gently. "I'll come and see you from time to time."

"And leave your little country inn?" said Mellicent, trying to smile. "You won't be able!"

"I could leave the landlady in charge," suggested Mr. Popham. "Stop, though, a landlady is the kind of article that doesn't go with the furniture and fixtures. I shall have to look out for her myself." His face changed. "Upon my word I shall!"

"I know the kind you'll choose," sighed Miss Mellicent. "And the best won't be good enough for you, Mr. Popham. She must be young and fair and plump and rosy and blue-eyed, with golden curls like the Fairy

Queen in that pantomime, or the lovely dolls I see in the shop windows when I'm out buying meat and groceries for the gentlemen. And her hands must be as white and soft as mine are red and hard. And——"

"Don't cry, my dear!" begged Mr. Popham. He stooped over her as she hid her flaming cheeks in the hard-worked hands. "You have pretty hair, Miss Mellicent," he said, with a sensation of surprise at the discovery.

"I've been turning out rooms," she sobbed, "and it's full of dust!"

"And you'd have a pretty figure," said Mr. Popham, now embarked upon a career of discovery, "if you took the trouble to pull 'em in. And you're young—barely thirty—and I'm ten years older. And you're a first-class double extra A.1. housekeeper, cook, and manager. See here! Give the lady proprietor a month's notice, and come and be landlady of the Bastling Arms at Helsham!"

"You—you're not in earnest?"

She faced him, quivering, transfigured, panting.

"Ain't I?" remarked Mr. Popham simply. "Say 'Yes,' Miss Mellicent; give me a kiss, and we shall both begin to believe it. Run and change your dress, and we'll call a cab and make another evening of it, and if the Alhambra ballet won't do as well as the pantomime, under the present circumstances, I shall be surprised! There's John Henry's knock at the hall door. He brings good news, or it wouldn't be such a loud one. It takes the girl ten minutes to get up the kitchen stairs; she's a born crawler, if ever there was one, and I've a fancy I should like you to let the boy in—if you've no objection?"

"Oh, no, no!" she cried gladly, and flashed out of the room.

"She's wonderfully nimble on her feet," mused Mr. Popham; "and though I've never seen 'em to my knowledge, I shouldn't mind putting a bit on the chance of their being pretty ones. Lord! I seem in for discoveries to-day. Come in, John Henry!"

But it was not John Henry, but the butler from Portland Place.

"Odlett! Well, this is kind; and you with such an objection to getting your feet damp!" Mr. Popham shook the large dough-colored hand of Mr. Odlett until the butler secured the member from further assault by putting it into his pocket.

"The boy was wanted to go upon an errand," explained Mr. Odlett, in the voice of the description known as rich. "And as a friend!"—his smile creased his large pale cheeks, and caused the temporary disappearance of his small twinkling eyes—"as a friend, no more port being wanted for the party in the library, I thought I'd come and put you out of your misery!"

"That was uncommon kind of you, Odlett!" breathed the acutely-anxious Mr. Popham. He wiped his brow, and fixed an intense gaze on the particular feature from which intelligence might be expected.

"The boy did his duty faithful from first to last," said Mr. Odlett, selecting a chair and carefully separating his coat-tails as a preliminary to sitting down; "and when he laughed, 'ad the presence of mind to drop his 'ead to the level of the library door-mat, consequently it was supposed to be the pug a-sneezing!"

"Well," gasped Mr. Popham. "Well?"

"The Will come up to our fondest expectations," continued Mr. Odlett. "Sir George, who never shoots, 'ave the General's old saloon-pistols and sporting Mantons, and *Bell's Life* and the *Army Gazette* for twenty year

back. Mr. Roderick is left the Chinese and Indian curiosities on condition of his dusting 'em hisself regularly. My Lady 'ave ten pounds to purchase a mourning-ring, provided she'll undertake to wear it; the young ladies ditto; and the money——"

"The money——" choked Mr. Popham.

"The money, with the exception of several smaller legacies, goes, with the consent of the Mayor and Corporation of Helsham, to purchase and lay out a Public Park for the people in memory of the Testator. There's to be a mausoleum in the middle of it, in which his crematory urn is to be kep', and a bandstand at each end, because he always loved to see people cheerful about him. Also, he bequeaths to Miss Mellicent Davis, at his lodgings in Margaret Place, five guineas and a set of ivory chessmen; and to his old and valued friend, William Odlett, which is me, the sum of two hundred pounds. He adds, he hopes I'll drink myself to death on it, inside of a month; but he always was a playful old gentleman. No—you're not forgotten!"

Mr. Popham wiped his brow with an air of relief.

"You're not forgotten—which ought to be a consolation to you!" repeated Mr. Odlett, creasing all over with a vast, comprehensive smile. "You're to 'ave his walking sticks, clothes, wigs, the rugs and plaids, and the spare set of teeth, hoping you'll always have something to employ 'em on. I came over a-purpose to tell you; you're so fond of a joke, Popham."

"I don't deny it," said the crushed and disappointed Mr. Popham; "but where the humor of this one is, hang me if I know!"

"You'll see by-and-by," said Mr. Odlett consolingly. "When you've 'ad time to think it over. Meanwhile I'll stand a couple of whiskies hot. A man don't come into

two hundred, cool, every day, and this windfall is particularly welcome. You know Madgell, the landlord of the Bastling Arms at Helsham, is gone over to the majority?"

Mr. Popham nodded a pale face.

"The lease, stock, goodwill, and fixtures of that pleasant little 'ouse is to be 'ad for what I call a song. And I'm going—in a week or so, when I've laid my hand secure on this here little legacy—to pop in and settle down. Plummer, the cook, a plump and capable young woman, 'ave expressed her willingness to be the landlady. I did suppose she had had a bit of an understanding with you. But she's quite come round my way since the reading of the will, and I thought you'd like to know it!"

"You're uncommon considerate," said the rasped and tingling Mr. Popham, "but I've made arrangements elsewhere."

"Perhaps the Other One will change her mind when she finds out you're diddled in your expectations!" said the comforting Mr. Odlett, shaking hands heartily. "Good-night. I shan't hear of you coming to the door!"

But Mr. Popham did come, and slammed it behind the departing form of Mr. Odlett with great heartiness.

"Damn his wigs and walking sticks!" he said in the murky passage, "and his spare teeth as well! A nice Job's comforter, Odlett! 'Perhaps she'll change her mind when she knows you've been diddled in your expectations.' Beg pardon, Miss Mellicent, I didn't see you were there! You're not hurt, are you?"

"Only by your thinking I could change!" said Miss Mellicent, with a sob.

The ground-floor sitting-room door stood ajar; the room was unoccupied. Mr. Popham led Miss Mellicent

in, turned up one of the blackened incandescent gas-jets, and stood petrified at the sight its hissing white glare revealed.

"A gray silk gown, trimmed with real lace, and a gold chain!" cried the bewildered Mr. Popham. "A diamond brooch, as I'm a living sinner! and an opera-mantle and kid gloves and a fan! And your pretty brown hair done up quite tastefully, and your eyes a-shining over the roses in your cheeks! What's done it? Who's responsible for it? How did it come about?"

If she had been less shy of him, she would have answered in two words, "Through love!" But she only faltered:

"I'm so glad you think I look a bit nice in them. They—they belonged to poor Aunt Davis, and I've had 'em altered to fit. She—she left them to me when she died!"

"And handed over the lodging-house and furniture to the present lady proprietor," observed Mr. Popham, searching in his trouser pocket for a cab whistle, "whom I don't happen to know by sight."

"Oh, yes, you do!" Miss Mellicent's blush and smile made quite a pretty little face of hers, and Mr. Popham boldly kissed it on the spot. "Oh yes, you do, for she's me! I should say, I am her! Law bless you, dear Mr. Popham, I didn't mean to startle you like that! Who cares about your being left a lot of old clothes and wigs instead of a sum of money—though you deserved it, true and faithful as you was to him that's gone! Haven't I plenty for both? And landlord of the Bastling Arms you shall be to-morrow, if you've set your heart on it! and we shall be late for the beautiful sights at the theater if you don't whistle for a taxicab."

"Life is certainly a switchback!" said Mr. Popham, as

he breathed and trilled alternately on the damp doorstep. "Now you're down a-lookin' up at your fellow-mortals, and now you're up, a-lookin' down upon 'em! . . . We'll have a bit of supper at that very fish-bar, if it's still in existence, on our way home, carefully drawing the line at oysters as risky and uncertain articles of diet for two middle-aged people about to enter upon the duties and privileges of married life!"

THE COLLAPSE OF THE IDEAL

CANWARDEN did not write sonnets, or he would have composed many, not only in celebration of Petronella's eyebrows, but of her crystalline blue eyes and burnished hair, her willowy figure of the latest and most wonderful shape, and her slim, white hands and arched insteps. But in all his plays—for he was a budding dramatist of exceeding promise—he described her in red-lined type:—“*Enter So-and-So, a fair and graceful girl of not more than twenty-five summers, with sapphire eyes and golden locks, attired in the costume of the period*” (whatever the period might be). “*She exhales the joyous freshness of a-May morning, and her gurgling laugh rivals the spring song of the thrush.*” This pleased the leading ladies hugely, even when their eyes were not of sapphire; but stage managers found Urban Canwarden's stage directions a trial. If he had been firmly seated in the motor-car of public approval, both hands on the driving-wheel as he ripped along the track of success, they would have smiled even while they writhed. But Canwarden was not yet famous, and the stage-managers were free not to disguise their feelings. However, he went on; getting thin—thin for a plump man—in the effort to make enough to marry on. For the beloved of his soul was not of the bread-and-cheese-and-kisses type of betrothed of whom we read in novels that have many years ago silted to the bottom-shelves in public libraries, and are occasionally issued as new in paper covers at fourpence-halfpenny. Her full name was Petronella Lesser, and she dwelt with her

parents in an Early Victorian villa on Haverstock Hill, a residence which had been slowly settling down on one side ever since the Tube borings had started. The lease would be out, old Mr. Lesser calculated, a day or two before the Corinthian-pillared stucco and brick porch sat down. He was something in the Italian warehouse supply-line in the City, and a singular judge of olives, Gruyère, and barreled Norwegian sprats. Petronella never looked a fairer, more poetic thing than when concealing vast quantities of these zests behind the latest thing in blouses, day or evening wear, and Urban Canwarden, as he gazed upon his betrothed, or very nearly so, swore to himself that she should never know what it is to go lacking the *hors d'œuvres* that lend piquancy to the Banquet of Life.

Petronella was a girl whose white and well-developed bosom was the home of emotions but little livelier than those that animate the beautiful person of a Regent-street wax-doll. Sawdust will burn, it is true, but the costlier puppets are stuffed with choicer stuffing. She had not fallen in love with Urban Canwarden; she had simply frozen on to him. She had liked sitting in the author's box on First Nights, while the author tore his hair at his Club or in his chambers. She liked his person, his friends, his prospects. She looked forward to an elegantly-furnished villa on Campden Hill, with a cottage at Sonning or Hampton Wick, and mid-winter runs to the South of France, when a distinguished dramatist, the husband of a charming and attractive wife, whose *salon* would be the constant resort of the fine flower, the top of the basket of London Society, should require rest and change of air after his exhausting labors undergone in the composition and rehearsal of the brilliant play, in four acts and eleven scenes,

destined to be the opening attraction of Mr. James Toplofty's Spring Season at the West End Theater. She would dream thus paragraphically, whenever she did dream, which was seldom, for her imaginative region was small. She was stupid and narrow, cold-hearted and mercenary.

"Since I have loved you," Canwarden would say, "I have been able to write of noble women. You have inspired me; everything that is best in me comes from you; everything I have done that is good I owe to you. . . ."

"You dear, exaggerating, Romantic Thing!" was invariably the reply of Petronella. "And when we are married we shall have a 28 h.p. Gohard with nickel fittings and a changeable body, and a chauffeur in livery. I used to dream of a dear little private brougham when we were first engaged, but nobody who wants to be thought Anybody would have such an old-fashioned thing now. How the world is changing, isn't it, with motors and airships and Tubes to travel in?"

* * * * *

The Haverstock Hill villa vibrated as she prattled, and the porch settled lower by the fraction of an inch. It was a July evening, and the lovers, arm-in-arm, paced up and down the damp and puddly graveled avenue under the liquid-soot-distilling lilacs and acacias. The reflection of a large fire danced upon the windows of Mrs. Lesser's drawing-room, and Petronella, despite the warmth of Canwarden's love, felt chilly. She wondered why Urban had pressed her to put on goloshes and a warm wrap after dinner and take this clammy evening stroll arm-in-arm with him. And then she was conscious that the heart against which her right hand rested thumped heavily, and she felt his arm tremble, and re-

membered that at dinner her betrothed had shown a poor appetite in conjunction with a well-developed thirst. As pigs are said to feel wind coming, as cats—even the most sedate—set up their backs and sprint about the garden at the approach of a storm, Petronella instinctively felt that bad news was in the air. A more sentimental and much prettier girl might have anticipated a shipwreck of the affections—expected to be told that Canwarden had found his Fate in another's eyes. Petronella's previsions of disaster concerned only his banking account. It was that to which she was really referring when she said she felt that something had happened.

"It is true, dearest," Canwarden said, with the kind of hoarse groan that he had not been able to extract from the leading young man in his last romantic drama even with the grappling-hooks of continued effort. "Something has happened. My great play—for that it is great I feel, and always shall, despite the slings and arrows of that eater of red meat, the Transatlantic critic . . . my great play, '*The . . .*'"

"I know, '*The Popshop Hearse*' . . ." Petronella put in hurriedly.

"No, no . . . '*The Poisoned Curse*,'" corrected the author, with a wince. "My play, produced a fortnight ago at Barney and Keedler's Classical Theater, New York, is a failure . . . a blank and utter failure! Yes, yes! the management did cable to me to say it had been enthusiastically received. I showed the message to you, and you shared my gladness. But here—here is another cable from my agent, Loris K. Boodler, of Skyscraper Mansions, 49,000,000 Broadway, that says . . ." He drew a crackling, flimsy paper from his waistcoat pocket, and tried to unfold it with hands that shook. "I can't

read it because it's too dark, but I remember every word. '*Your—play—taken—off—Saturday—following—production. Variety vaudeville substituted. Writing. Boodler.*' And I was looking forward to the author's fees to"—he coughed in a choky way—"to furnish our house and . . . and buy that motor-car you were talking about. It . . . it seemed so sure a thing! I had got such capital percentages; Barney and Keedler had cabled to say the play was a success. . . ." He choked. "And now! . . ."

"You told me all that before, dear," said Petronella. "But you have two other plays coming out, haven't you, in London theaters? . . . West End houses. . . . And one failure doesn't spell ruin. . . ."

"One failure can break a dramatist, when it is a failure of this kind," said her disconsolate lover. "Those two other plays are . . . were coming out at theaters held by the same lessees—Barney and Keedler, of the Mammoth American Dramatic Trust. And so, don't you see, all my balloons are deflated at once. I've come down with a crash, and . . . it hurts! But you will trust me, won't you? You will go on believing in me, though I've had what technical people will call a set-back. And if our . . . our marriage must be delayed . . ." He stopped under one of the liquid soot-distilling lilacs, and caught Petronella in his arms, crushing the draperies arranged by her Hampstead dressmaker roughly against his damp evening overcoat. "You will not mind! . . . We will wait and hope, and love each other . . . love each other. . . . After all, while we are together, nothing is too hard to bear. . . ."

Thus spoke Canwarden, counting his chickens ere their emergence from the shell, after the fashion of a young man too deeply in love to see clearly what manner of

young woman his heart is set upon. But Petronella shivered, conscious that the Hampstead garden was clammy, and that the dazzling halo of coming fame and approaching prosperity had been banished from Canwarden's brow. He stood before her, tall and straight, and sufficiently good to look at, with his bright brown eyes, straight, short nose, and sensitive, clean-shaven lips, though his curly hair, it must be added, was receding too fast from a brow more bumpy than, according to the accepted canons of classical proportion, a brow should be. Upon his shirt-front a lilac had shed an inky tear, and his voice was husky with love and sorrow, not of an utterly selfish kind, as he promised Petronella to work hard, never to cease working until he had regained the lost ground.

"But you never may! . . ." she said, and the doubt in those shallow blue eyes—he never had realized before that they were shallow—pierced him to the soul. "And Nora will be married before me, and she is two years younger, and everybody in Hampstead will say . . ."

Canwarden, with heat, devoted Hampstead to the devil. I am not defending him. Petronella thought him brutal, coarse, and profane. Women of Petronella's kind always enthusiastically uphold the dignity of the devil. She told him what she thought, and she wound up in the red-papered hall of the one-sided Hampstead villa by saying that he and she had better part. She added, as women of Petronella's type invariably do add, that the dead past might bury its dead. And she drew off her engagement ring—an olivine, imposed by a Bond Street jeweler upon the too-confiding Canwarden as an emerald, harnessed between two indifferent diamonds of yellowish hue—and thrust it back upon him, and went upstairs to her room and locked the door; and as the

hall door banged violently and the iron avenue gates clashed behind the haggard Canwarden, his late betrothed sat down to pen a little note to Percy Flicker—a young man without a chin, junior partner of a small but pushing firm of shipbrokers at No. 35,000 Cornhill. The porch made up its mind and sat down that night, and Percy the chinless called upon the following evening, and was compelled to enter his Love's bower by the back-door.

And Canwarden, seeing volcanic ruins smoking where his Castle of Hope had stood, wandered the West End and the Strand like a thing accursed. He went into his club, and men slapped him on the shoulder and congratulated him upon the New York success. They would learn the truth later, he said to himself, and then they would chuckle and sneer. The rustling of the cablegram in his waistcoat pocket whispered "Yes s's'!" Meanwhile he had no appetite for solid food, and, quenching the thirst that consumed him with iced brandy-and-soda, he, Canwarden, usually the most temperate of men, realized how easily spanned is the gulf that severs the sober man from the inebriate. He might, perhaps, have crossed it for good and all had he not chanced to pass the invitingly open door of Grow's Transatlantic Bureau of Exchange. The shipping advertisements loomed large and gaily-colored in the window; passenger lists and railway guides hung from hooks upon the walls, and lay in piles upon the counter, and a civil clerk and an attractive girl with squirrel-colored hair were busy over ledgers and things. Prompted by his guardian angel Canwarden went in and asked for the New York papers. The mail was just in, and he got them, and, leaning on the polished shelf-desk where people write out code telegrams, he turned to the theatrical column. His

drama, *The Poisoned Curse*, had been withdrawn a fortnight ago from the stage of Barney and Kèedler's Theater—slain as a thing unfit to live—and a variety vaudeville substituted in its stead. Did not the cablegram—Loris K. Boodler's cablegram—say so? He would see the hideous announcement for himself, and then go under, as men went who had broken the golden bowl of Youth and Hope, and were too weary to go on fighting.

Could it . . . could it be a mistake . . . ? Was the play a success after all? It looked like it. For in flamboyant type *The Poisoned Curse: a Romantic Drama* in four acts and eleven scenes, by Urban Canwarden, was announced by the *New York Trumpeter* as being presented to-night, and every night, and to-day at 1.30, and Saturday *matinées* as announced. The play had been running when Loris K. Boodler sent the cablegram announcing its withdrawal; the play was running now—would run. Canwarden's hands shook so that the flimsy news-sheet tore. He glanced at the girl with the squirrel-colored hair and apologized, saying that he would pay for the paper. She smiled, and he found that he was able to smile back again. He despatched a short but expressive cablegram to the office of Mr. Loris K. Boodler, relieving that smart and go-ahead agent from further responsibility in connection with the collection of his percentages, and walked out of Grow's Transatlantic Bureau of Exchange with his head up—a free man.

Petronella married Percy Flicker. Canwarden is a flourishing and popular dramatist, with a thumping bank balance and a permanent predilection for bachelor existence. All the female villains in his plays are blondes. The stage directions, underlined in red, run thus: "*Enter So-and-So, a fair and slightly formed woman of barely thirty, with icy and repellent blue eyes and hair of a*

pale and sunless straw color. She conveys the impression of cold insincerity and self-centered absorption, and her hard and mocking laugh falls gratingly upon the ear." Which goes to prove that Human Nature is and never will be anything but Human Nature until the Curtain drops.

THE HAND THAT FAILED

FOUR men were seated about a round table, with dessert and wine upon it, in the dining-room of a luxuriously furnished house in a fashionable street in the West End of London—a street which is the Eldorado of the struggling professional man, the Tom Tiddler's ground of successful members of the faculties of surgery and medicine. The aroma of Turkish coffee and choice Havanas was warm and fragrant upon the air, and the Bishop consented to a second Benedictine. His left-hand neighbor was a dry-faced, courteous gentleman, a King's Counsel, famous by reason of several *causes célèbres*. The third man at table was merely a hard-working, small-earning practitioner of medicine and surgery, settled in a populous suburb of the high-lying North. Coming to the host, with whom the Highgate Doctor had walked the hospitals in his student days, one may describe him as a world-famous Consulting Specialist and operator; one of the kings of the scalpel, the bistoury, and the curette; a man of medals, orders, and scientific titles innumerable. Forty-three years of age, shortly about to be married (to a widowed niece of the Bishop), and in excellent spirits—a thought too excellent, perhaps. . . .

"Wants rest, decidedly. Pupils of the eyes unnaturally dilated, circulation not what it ought to be. Overdone. . . . Changed color when the servant dropped a fork just now. . . . He had better take care!" said the

Highgate Doctor to himself. He had to deal with many cases of nervous breakdown up Highgate way, where there are so many composers and clerks and journalists. But the Bishop and the King's Counsel had never seen the Distinguished Surgeon look more fit, and so they told him.

"What makes it more remarkable, in my poor opinion"—the Bishop, employing his favorite phrase, emptied his liqueur-glass and folded his plump, white hands—"being that our distinguished friend here"—he waved the fattest and whitest of his thumbs toward his host—"seldom, if ever, takes a holiday."

"When," said the Distinguished Surgeon, playing with a gold fruit-knife belonging to a set which had formed part of the First Napoleon camp-equipment at Leipsic, "when a professional man's brain is absolutely clear, his nerves infallibly steady; when his digestion, sleep, appetite are unimpaired by any amount of physical and mental labor; when his hand is the ready, unerring, unflinching servant of his will at all times and all seasons, what need has that man of rest and relaxation?" The strong, supple, finely-modeled hand went on playing with the historical fruit-knife, as its owner added: "Work is my play! For change of air, give me change of experience; for change of scene, new cases, or fresh developments of familiar ones. The excitement of the gaming table, or any other form of excitement, would be a poor exchange for the sensations of the operator, the skilled, experienced, unerring operator, who calculates to the fraction of an inch the depth of the incision his scalpel makes in the body of the anæsthetized patient extended on the glass-table before him. Life or Death are his to give, and the trembling of the balance one way or the other is to be guided and controlled by his

unerring eye, his unerring brain, and his skilled, infallible hand. He holds the balances of Fate—he guides and controls Destiny, and knows his power and glories in it. He is a supreme artist—not in clay or marble, gold or silver, pigments or enamels—but in living flesh and blood!”

The Bishop shifted in his chair uneasily, and turned a little pale about the gills. The removal of the episcopal appendix some months previously had preserved to the Church of England one of its principal corner-stones; and the neat, red seam underneath the Bishop’s apron on the right side, on the spot that would have been covered by the vest-pocket of an ordinary layman, twitched and tingled. And the King’s Counsel, who had once undergone a minor operation for throat-trouble, hurriedly gulped down a mouthful of port. The Highgate Doctor alone answered, fixing his steel-rimmed pince-nez securely on his nose, and tilting his chin so as to get the host’s face well into focus: “He is a supreme artist, as you say, and he delights in his work. But supposing him to delight too much? Supposing him to have arrived at such a pass that he cannot live without the excitement of it!—that he indulges in the exercise of his beneficent profession as a cocaine-drinker or hashish-eater, or morphinomaniac, indulges in the drug that destroys him, morally and physically—how long will he retain in their perfection the faculties which have made him what he is?”

“As long as he chooses!” said the Distinguished Surgeon, putting down the gold fruit-knife, and rising with the easy air of the well-bred host. “He is no longer a mere man, but a highly-gearred and ingeniously-planned machine, in all that concerns the peculiar physical functions brought to bear upon the exercise of his profession.

To lie idle, for such a machine, means rust and ruin; to work unceasingly is to increase facility and gain in power, and, provided it be carefully looked after—and I assure you my nuts and bearings receive the necessary amount of attention!—the machine of which I speak may go on practically forever!” And he ushered his guests through the folding doors into his luxurious consulting-room.

“Unless there happened,” put in the King’s Counsel, “to be a screw loose?”

“My dear fellow,” said the Distinguished Surgeon, with a smile, “my screws are never neglected, I have assured you. The machine won’t come to grief that way!”

“It might come to grief in another way,” said the Highgate Doctor in a queer voice. “The Inventor might stop it Himself, just to prove to His handiwork that it *was* a machine—and something more!”

At this remark, plopped into the middle of the calm duck-pond of sociality, the Bishop looked pained, as might an elderly spinster of severe morals at an allusion savoring of impropriety. The King’s Counsel, feeling for the Bishop, turned the conversation; but the Distinguished Surgeon and the Highgate Doctor were at it again, hammer and tongs, in a minute.

“I do not simply believe I shall not fail, my dear fellow! I *know* I shall not! As for——” (the Distinguished Surgeon, sitting smoking in his Louis Quinze consulting-chair, mentioned a certain operation in abdominal surgery, delicate, difficult, and dangerous in the extreme) “I have performed it hundreds of times, successfully, within the last twelvemonth, leaving minor operations—scores of them”—he waved the scores aside with a movement of the supple hand—“entirely out of

the question! At the Hospital to-day" (mentioning the name of a great public institution) "I operated in seven cases, bringing up the number to one thousand and one. The last was the most interesting case I have met with for some time, presenting complications rendering the use of the knife both difficult and risky, but——"

The sharp whirring tingle of the telephone bell punctuated the Distinguished Surgeon's sentence: "But she'll pull through; I guarantee it! We'll have the bandages off in three weeks. She'll be walking about before the month's out like the others!"

"Under Providence let us hope so!" said the Bishop, encircled by a halo of fragrant cigar smoke. "Thank you, yes, I will take a whisky-and-soda. Without presumption, let us hope so, remembering, trusting in—arah—the—arah—the Divine assurance."

"You may take the assurance from me, my lord!" said the Distinguished Surgeon. He got up and went to the fireplace (carved by Adam), and leaned one elbow lightly on the mantelshelf—an easy attitude, but instinct with pride and power. "As I have said, Case One Thousand and One is a difficult case. I could name surgeons of repute who would have hesitated to operate; but, given the requisite skill and the necessary care, failure, I hold, is out of the question. I have never failed yet—I do not intend to fail. It's impossible!"

The second shrill, imperative summons of the telephone bell ended the Distinguished Surgeon's sentence.

"Tch! They're ringing ye up on the telephone from somewhere," said the Highgate Doctor.

"Find out what they want, Donald, there's a good fellow," said the Distinguished Surgeon, buttonholed by the Bishop, whose urbane benevolence had creased into

smiles tinctured with roguishness, as he related a clerical after-dinner story.

And the Highgate Doctor rang back, and unhooked the receiver and cried: "Halloa?" and listened to the thin ghost of a voice that droned and tickled at his ear, and turned toward the Distinguished Surgeon a face that had suddenly been bleached of all color.

"Well, who is it?" the Distinguished Surgeon asked.

"It's the House Surgeon at the Hospital. Perhaps ye would speak to him yourself?" the Highgate Doctor said thickly; and the Distinguished Surgeon, released by the chuckling Bishop, strolled over and took the Highgate Doctor's place at the receiver.

"Halloa! Yes, it's Sir Arthur Blank!" he called, and the ghostly voice came back. . . . "One of the abdominal sections in the Mrs. Solomon Davis Ward . . . Number Seven . . . Mrs. Reed . . . Hæmorrhage. . . . Imminent danger . . . collapse. . . . Come at once!"

The Distinguished Surgeon glanced round, with eyes that were sunk in pits quite newly dug. The Bishop, still in his anecdotage, was buttonholing the King's Counsel. Plainly they had not overheard. And as the Distinguished Surgeon took out his handkerchief and wiped the cold damps from a face that had gone gray and shiny, he knew relief. He avoided looking point-blank at the Highgate Doctor as he made his courteous excuses to his guests. "An urgent case—suddenly called away for an hour. My dear Lord, my dear Entwhistle, my dear Donald, entertain yourselves for that space of time, and don't deprive me of a pleasant end to this delightful evening!"

But the Bishop, recently wedded for the third time, took leave, accepting his host's offer of dropping him at his hotel, and the pair got into fur coats and a snug

ante-brougham and drove away together. Soon after, somebody from the Chancery Buildings came with an urgent summons for the King's Counsel, and he melted away with regrets, and the Highgate Doctor sat in the luxurious consulting-room, and started at every stoppage of swift wheels in the streets.

The silent servants came and looked to the fire, the Pompadour clock upon the mantel chimed eleven! And then, looking up out of a brown study, the Highgate Doctor saw his host returned, and started at his worn and haggard aspect. As the demure servant relieved him of his coat and hat, and vanished, the Distinguished Surgeon dropped into an easy-chair and sat shading his face with the right hand, whose steadiness he had so vaunted. And that infallible, unerring hand shook as if with palsy.

The Highgate Doctor could bear no more. . . .

"O man," he said—in moments of excitement his accent savored of from north of the Tweed—"dinna sit glowering and shaking there! I ken weel what has happened! Your pride has got the killing thrust; she is in her death-pangs at this minute I'm talking, and you stand face to face wi' One you have denied! Am I richt or no?"

The Distinguished Surgeon moved the shaking hand and said, not in the calm level tone the Highgate Doctor knew, but one jerky and uneven:

"You are right! You shall know the truth, though it places my reputation at your mercy. . . ."

"Forget your reputation a meenute," said the Highgate Doctor. "As to Case One Thousand and One . . . is the woman dead?"

"No . . ." said the other—"no, I reached the Hospital

in time . . . we called up the chart-nurse and the Matron, had her taken up to the theater and——”

“Found that ye had bungled—for once in your life!” said the Highgate Doctor. “And weel for you, if not for your patient, that it is so. The ligature had slipped, I take it, being insecurely tied?”

The Distinguished Surgeon looked him steadily between the eyes and answered:

“The ligature was not tied at all! A grosser instance of neglect I never met with.” He got up and leaned against the mantelshelf, folding his arms. “I said so pretty plainly, and I have made a minute on the Hospital register to that effect. I shall also draw the attention of the Committee to the matter without delay!”

The Highgate Doctor blew his nose violently. His eyeglasses were misty.

“Ye have censured yourself? Ye will report yourself? O man! I kenned ye were a great one, but ye have never been so great—in my eyes—as ye are this night!”

“Thank you!” said the Distinguished Surgeon, as the two men gripped hands. “And—Donald, old fellow—I am going to take a holiday!”

“Where is the whisky-and-soda?” said the Highgate Doctor gleefully.

HIS SILHOUETTE

HE walked down Upper Bond Street, after leaving his chambers, half-way up on the left-hand side. The ground-floor is occupied by the only London purveyor of American chewing-gum, who does a tremendous business in the imported article, and the shop is crowded all day by ladies, young and old, whose jaws, even in moments of repose from conversation, are in perpetual motion. Englishwomen do not yet chew gum. Let us hope that our wives, sweethearts, sisters, and cousins will be slow to acquire what, in my opinion, is an unpleasant habit, but too suggestive of arboreal tendencies inherited from anthropoid ancestors."

The man who was telling the story stretched out his hand across the coffee-cups to select a toothpick. The man who opposed him at the table promptly annexed the glass-and-silver receptacle containing the article required.

"The original ape," he said, "probably employed a twig. I cannot encourage you in a practice you so strongly denounce. Waiter, take these things away! Bonson, my good fellow, let us hear your story—if it is worth hearing. If not, keep it to yourself. The man began by walking down Bond Street. There is nothing original in that. I myself do it every day without being the hero of a story."

"This man was the hero of a tragedy," said the man who was telling the story. "Other people might smile at it for a farce—it was a tragedy to him."

"Where did the horror of it come in?" asked the other man.

"Under Shelmadine's waistcoat," said the man who had been addressed as Bonson. "Shelmadine was losing his figure, which had been his joy and pride and the delight of the female eye ever since he left Oxford, without his degree, and, thanks to the influence of his uncle, Colonel Sir Barberry Bigglesmith, K.C.B., Assistant Under-Secretary to the Ordnance Office Council, took up a Second Division Higher-grade Clerkship at £280 per annum, which sufficiently supplemented his younger son's allowance of £500 to make it feasible to get along with some show of decency—don't you follow me?"

"If I had followed this beggar down Upper Bond Street," hinted the other man, knocking an ash off a long, slim High Dutch cigar, "where would he have led me?"

"Into his tailor's," said the man who had been addressed as Bonson promptly. "He walked in there regularly every day on his way to the War Office. Clothes were his passion—in fact, he simply couldn't live without clothes!"

"Could we?" answered the other man simply.

"I have heard that Europeans shipwrecked on the palm-fringed shores of a Pacific Island," said Bonson, "have managed to do very well without them. Under those circumstances, let me tell you, Shelmadine would still have managed to be well dressed. He would have evolved style out of cocoa-fiber and elegance out of banana-leaves, or he would have died in the attempt. I am trying to convey to you that he had a genius for clothes. He evolved ideas which sartorial artists were only too happy to carry out. He gave bootmakers hints

which made their reputations. He would run over to Paris every month or so to look at Le Bargy's hat and cravats. He never told anyone where he got his walking sticks, but they were wonderful. I tell you——"

"Every man likes to be well dressed," said the man who was listening to the story, "but this beggar seems to have had coats and trousers on the brain."

"Rather," said the narrator. "He thought of clothes, dreamed of clothes—lived for clothes alone. Garments were his fad, his folly, his passion, his mania, his dearest object in life. Men consulted him—men who wanted to be particularly well got-up couldn't do better than put themselves in Shelmadine's hands. He permitted no servile copying of the modes and styles he exhibited on his person. 'Forge my name,' he said to a fellow once, 'but never copy the knot of my necktie!' Chap took the advice, and did forge his name—to the tune of £60. Shelmadine would not prosecute. He was planning an overcoat—a kind of Chesterfield, cut skirty—with which he made a sensation at Doncaster this year, and when a certain Distinguished Personage condescended to order one like it, Shelmadine made the three he had got, quite new, and wickedly expensive, into a parcel, poured on petrol, and applied a match. Shut himself up for three days, and appeared on the fourth with a perfectly new silhouette."

"A perfectly new what?" said the listener, with circular eyes.

"Shelmadine's creed was that for a man to look thoroughly well dressed he must have a perfect silhouette. Every line about him must be perfect. The sweep of the shoulders, the spring of the hips, the arch over the instep, and so forth, must display the cut of scissors wielded by an artist—not a mere workman. Now, on

this particular morning, not so very long ago, it had been brought home to him, as he looked in his full-length, quadruple-leaved, swing-balance, double lever-action cheval glass, that the reflection it gave back to him was not quite satisfactory. His silhouette did not satisfy him. Then all at once came with a rush the overwhelming discovery that he was——”

“Getting potty,” said the listener. “Those Government clerkships play the devil with a man’s waist. Nothing to do but eat, drink, sleep, walk, or drive to the Office and sit in a chair gumming up envelopes or drawing heads on the blotting-paper when you’re there, until you fall asleep. Once you’re asleep, you don’t wake till it’s time to go home. Consequently you develop adipose tissue.” He yawned.

“Do you suppose,” asked the teller of the tale, with large contempt, “that Shelmadine lived the life of one of those human marmots—Shelmadine, a man so sensitively, keenly alive to the beauty of Shape, Form, Line, and Proportion? Do you dream that he lightly risked the inevitable result of indulgence in the pleasures of the table or the delights of drowsiness? If so, you are wrong. He rose at 5 a.m., winter and summer, in town or country, and after a hot bath, followed by a cold douche, pursued a course of physical exercises until seven, when he breakfasted on milkless tea, dry toast, or gluten biscuits”—the other man shuddered—“with, perhaps, a little plain boiled fish, its lack of flavor undisguised by Worcester sauce or any other condiment.”

“Horrible!” said the other man. “I once tried . . .”

“After breakfast, in all weathers, he walked five miles, within the Radius, returning to dress for the day. Anon he would saunter down Bond Street, look in at the shops, where he was adored, and criticize the new models sub-

mitted to him, as only Shelmadine could, show himself at his Club, stroll in the Park, and get to the Ordnance Office about eleven. The floors at Whitehall are solidly built, consequently his habit of jumping backward and forward over the office-table when he felt his muscles dangerously relaxed, met with little, if any, opposition in the Department. Dumb-bells, of course, were always ready to hand. At his Club the invariable luncheon supplied to him was the eye of a grilled cutlet, a glass of claret and water, eight stewed prunes, and, of course, more gluten biscuits. He shunned fat-forming foods more than he would the devil!"

"And made his life a hell!" said the other man, with conviction.

"My dear fellow," said the relater, "you can't understand what a man's life is or is not until you have seen both sides of it. A Second Division Higher-Grade War Office clerkship allows of a good deal of liberty. Picture Shelmadine as the *enfant gâté* of Society, followed, stared at, caressed and courted, by the smartest feminine leaders of fashion, as well as by the swellest men, as the acknowledged Oracle in Clothes. There's a position for a young man single-handed to have achieved. To be the vogue—the rage—the *coq de village*—the *village* being London—and at twenty-seven."

"Exhausting," said the other man, "to keep up, but sufficiently agreeable. Quite sufficiently agreeable! And I realize that at the psychological moment, when the fellow discovered that his figure had begun to run to seed, he sustained a shock—kind of cold moral and mental *douche* a professional beauty gets when her toilet glass shows her the first crow's-foot. Did your friend have hysterics and ask his valet for sal-volatile? I should expect it of him!"

"Shelmadine did not employ a man," said the teller of the tale, fixing his eyeglass firmly in its place, "to do anything but brush his clothes. For all other purposes connected with the toilet he preferred a Swiss lady's-maid. Do not misunderstand, my friend," he added sternly, as the listener exploded in a guffaw of laughter. "*Honi soit* . . . the rest of the quotation is familiar to you. And Mariette Duchâtel had been strongly recommended to him by his aunt, Lady Bigglesmith, as a most desirable person for the post of housekeeper. She was at least fifty—retained the archæological remains of good looks, and owned a moustache a buddin' Guardsman might be jealous of, by Jingo! But her heart had remained youthful, or we may so conjecture."

"I begin to tumble to the situation of the swelling subject of your story," said the other man, pouring out a Benedictine. "When your elderly housekeeper happens to be in love with you, it is bad enough. Things become complicated when the victim of your charms happens to be your maid. Continue!"

"A visit to his tailor's on the day on which my story begins," said Bonson, "convinced Shelmadine that—in fact, his outlines were becoming indefinite. 'This will not do, sir,' said his tailor, a grave and himself a portly personage, 'with your reputation for silhouette to keep up—and at your years. We will let out the garment one inch—a thing I decline to do even for Royal Personages, as destructive of the design—and as this is now the Autumn Season I recommend you to obtain leave. Klümpenstein in the Tyrol has a reputation for reducing weight; its waters have done wonders for several of my customers, and the Rittenberg affords several thousand feet of climbing opportunity to tourists who wish to be quickly rid of superfluous girth. But, first of all, I

should consult Dr. Quox, of Harley Street. Good-morning.'

"Quox of Harley Street went into Shelmadine's case, elicited the fact that his maternal grandfather had turned the scale at twenty stone, that his mother, Lady Fanny, hadn't seen her own shoe-buckles for eighteen years, except when the shoes weren't on—don't you twig?—and that he possessed what Quox pleased to call 'a record of family obesity.' So Shelmadine, who, in spite of rigorous diet and redoubled physical exercises, kept getting more and more uncertain in his outlines, rushed frantically off to Klumpenstein in the Tyrol, with what was, for him, quite a limited wardrobe. He drank the water—infernally nasty, too—and climbed the Rittenberg religiously, without finding his lost silhouette. Only on the Dolomittenweg, a pine-shaded promenade of great promise in the flirtatious line, he did find—a girl. And, despite his anxiety with regard to his silhouette, they had an uncommonly pleasant time together."

"He had left his lady's-maid behind, I presume?" hinted the listener.

"He had," said Bonson. "When he got back to London, though, Mariette met him with a shriek. 'Heavens!' cried she, throwing up her hands, 'the figure of Monsieur—the silhouette on which he justly prided himself, where—where has it gone? Hélas! those beautiful clothes that have arrived from the tailor's during the absence of Monsieur—*jamais de la vie* will he be able to get into them, *j'en suis baba* in contemplating the extraordinary *embonpoint* of Monsieur.'

"'Hang it, Mariette!' said Shelmadine, quite shocked; 'am I so beastly bulged as all that comes to?' Mariette broke down at that, and went into floods of tears. It

took the best part of a bottle of Cognac to bring her round, and then Shelmadine set about overhauling his wardrobe."

"Nothing would meet, I presume?" hinted the man who had been listening.

"Not by three finger-breadths," said the man who was telling the story. "Plwondllellm Wells in North Wales has got a kind of reputation for making stout kine lean. Shelmadine got extension of leave on account of bereavement. . . ."

"When a man loses his figure he may be said to be bereaved!" nodded the listener.

"Shelmadine tried the Wells, without success. All he ate was weighed out in ounces, all he drank measured out with the most grudging care; nothing was allowed to enter his system that contained anything conducive to the accumulation of the hated tissue, but nothing could keep him from putting it on!"

"Poor brute!" said the hearer.

"He had gone to the Wells a distinctly roundabout figure. He came back a potty young man! Despair preyed upon his vitals without reducing his bulk, however. He saw 'Slimaline' advertised."

"I know," said the listener. "A harmless vegetable compound which reduces the bulkiest middle-aged human figure of either sex in the course of a few weeks to the slender proportions of graceful youth. Three-and-sixpence a bottle, sent secretly packed, to any address in the United Kingdom. *Bis!*"

"He then," continued the narrator, "went in for 'Frosher's Fat-Reducing Soap.' Perhaps you are not acquainted with that compound, which is rubbed briskly into the—ah—the——"

"Personality," put in the other man.

“ . . . Until a strong lather is obtained. The lather proved ineffectual; Shelmadine took to stays.”

“Phew!” puffed the other man.

The first man continued:

“As the weary weeks went on he was compelled to return to his desk at Whitehall—crouching in a taxicab to avoid observation. But concealment was useless. From the Department allotted to the Second Division Higher-Grade clerks the secret crept out, and Society pounced upon it and tore it to shreds, shrieking.”

“Like ’em,” said the listener—“like ’em!”

“That night, as Shelmadine sat in his dainty dressing-room surrounded by mountains of costly and elegant clothes, which, though only of the previous season’s make, would no longer accommodate his proportions,” went on Bonson—“lounging clothes, shooting clothes, walking clothes of all descriptions—London did not contain a wretcheder man. The exquisitely chosen waistcoats, the taffetas shirts of the once slim dandy of the War Office—a world too narrow for the fat man who now represented him—were in piles about him. Dozens of lovely gloves in all the newest shades—squirrel-gray, dead-leaf yellow, Havana-brown, chrysanthemum-buff—were scattered around by the hands that were now too stout to wear them. Piles of boots—afternoon boots, with uppers of corduroy leather, gray, fawn, or the white antelope, emblematical of the blameless pattern of virtue; walking boots, shooting boots, and shoes of all descriptions; slippers in heliotrope, rose-petal pink, and lizard-skin green, obscured the furniture. The pedal extremities that had bulged beyond all reasonable limits must now be accommodated in large Number Nines. Even Shelmadine’s dressing gowns—foulard silk, lined with cashmere—had declined to contain him.”

"'Pon my word, you make me sorry for the idiot," said the listener; "mere clothes-peg, as he seems to have been!"

"Suicide—the thought of suicide had occurred to him."

"He ought to have swallowed a set of enamel evening buttons or a set of five jeweled tie-pins," suggested the listener, "and taken leave of the world in an appropriate manner."

"I won't go so far as to say that he would not have done something desperate," continued the man who was telling the story, "had not Mariette—who may or may not have suspected that things were getting to a desperate pitch—appeared upon the scene. 'Poor lamb! thou art in despair'—thus she addressed Shelmadine in the affectionate idiom with which her native language abounds—'confide in Mariette, who alone can restore the silhouette that seems for ever lost to thee. Seems only, Monsieur; for at the bidding of me, myself, it will return. A little condition is attached to the recovery of thy figure, my child—not to be carried out if I cannot be as good as my word. *Passe moi la casse, je te passerai le séné.* All I want, Monsieur, is senna for my rhubarb—your written promise to marry Mariette Duchâtel, daughter of Marius Duchâtel, druggist of Geneva, if within three months you recover your beautiful figure. What do you say? Is it a bargain? Will you be fat and free, or slim and no longer single? Speak, then! You agree? *Pour sûr!* I thought you would!'"

"And did he marry his lady's-maid?" asked the listening man quite eagerly.

"He did not," said the teller of the tale, "though he was very near it. Fortunately for Shelmadine, the girl he had met on the Dolomittenweg Promenade stepped

in. She was an American, original, independent, and determined. When Shelmadine wrote—on Ordnance Office paper—to her in Paris, saying that Fate had stepped in between them, and that she never could be his, she asked the reason why. Not getting a satisfactory answer, she ran over to London to see for herself . . . bringing her mother—a vast person, who wore a diamond tiara, mittens, and diamond shoulder-straps in the evening, and carried them in a hip-bag by day—with her.”

“The American mother is an appendage,” said the listener, “rather than a necessity.”

“The sight of Shelmadine, who had expanded like a balloon in the filling-shed since the happy days at Klumpenstein, was to Miss Van Kyper—Miss Mamie Van Kyper was her complete name,” went on the man who had been called Bonson—“an undoubted shock.”

“Of course,” agreed the man who was being told the story.

“They met at the Carlton Hotel, where she had engaged a suite of reception-rooms for the interview.”

“Not being quite certain whether one would hold Shelmadine?” suggested the other.

“And the matter was thrashed out satisfactorily in five minutes, where an English girl would have taken five weeks. ‘I guess there’s a good deal more of you than ever either of us expected there would be,’ said Mamie; ‘but I’ve got to choose between having too much of the man I love, or nothing at all. And it seems mighty unreasonable—when I felt plum-sure at Klumpenstein that I could never have enough of you—that I should be miserable here in London because there happens to be a good deal more than there was then.’ With a gush of warm and affectionate devotion she twined

her arms as far round Shelmadine as they would go, and he, in accepting the fate that made him the husband of Miss Mamie Van Kyper, renounced his silhouette for ever!"

"But you said he got it back again!" said the second man.

"He has," said the first man.

"Without the assistance of Mariette Duchâtel, daughter of Marius Duchâtel, herbalist, of Geneva?" queried the second man.

"Mariette," said the first man, "on finding Shelmadine indisposed to accept her offer, first attempted to commit suicide in a cistern; then threw up the sponge and made a clean breast of everything. A peculiar vegetable preparation, the secret of which she had had from her father, the herbalist of Geneva, administered in Shelmadine's food, had caused the extraordinary accumulation of adipose tissue. The antidote, which she had promised to administer in the intervals of her own designs on my poor friend's freedom, she confided to him, with bitter tears and many entreaties for forgiveness, before she went out of the Bond Street flat and Shelmadine's life for ever."

"He married Miss Van Kyper immediately. He has an Assistant-Principal clerkship at the Ordnance Office; he has recovered his silhouette, but he no longer cares for clothes. You could scare rooks with him as he dresses now. Fact!"

"Facts are confoundedly rummy things!" said the man who had been told the story.

A NOCTURNE

YOU look," He said nastily, as She raised her disheveled *coiffure* and tear-blurred features from the center of a large muslin-flounced and covered cushion that sat at the end of the lounge that opened like a box, and held frilled petticoats—"you look like a wilted prize chrysanthemum."

She mechanically put up one hand to drive home deserting hairpins into the mass of hair He had, in the lyrical days of early passion, celebrated as Corinthian gold-bronze, in a halting sonnet of which he was now profoundly ashamed. Stifling the recurrent hiccough that accompanies a liberal effusion of tears, she stared at him blankly.

A silver timepiece, a wedding present from His mother, who had objected to the match, struck the midnight hour. The thin sound of the last stroke, spun into tenuity by silence, died, and the clanking, hooting, nerve-shattering scurry of racing motor-buses went by like a wild hunt of iron-shackled fiends. A private car passed with its exhaust wailing like an exiled banshee, a be-lated hansom or two bowled along the sloppy asphalt, the raucous screech of a constable-defying nymph of the pavement rent the muggy air. He hardly heard it; he had been agreeing with his mother ever since the clock had struck. To-morrow he would go and look in at 000, Sloane Street, and tell her that she had always known best. In imagination he was telling her so, when the sable-bordered tail of a dove-colored Indian cash-

mere dressing gown he had worshiped during the honeymoon swept across the *feuille-rose* carpet in the direction of the boudoir; Sada Yacco and Abé San, snub-nosed, blue-and-pink-bowed canine causes of the conjugal quarrel, joyously yelping in its wake.

"Aren't you going to bed?" He demanded.

"You did not seem inclined to go to your dressing-room," She returned with point, "and as I have to write an important letter, I may as well do it now!"

He knew that the letter would be addressed to Her mother, who had also objected to the match, and would contain a daughter's testimony to the correctness of the maternal judgment. Sada Yacco and Abé San, sitting on their haunches, with their pink tongues lolling, looked as though they knew it too. How he loathed those Japanese pugs! As he glared at them she gathered them up, one under each arm, protectingly.

"Don't be afraid!" He said, with the kind of laugh described by the popular novelist as grating; "I am not going to murder the little brutes, after paying thirty pounds for the pair." This was a touch of practical economy that made Her lip curl. "What I say is, I decline to have those animals galloping over me in the middle of the night."

"It is the middle of the night now," She said, concealing a yawn behind three fingers—his wedding-ring and keeper upon one—"and they are not galloping over you. Men are supposed to be more logical than women. I have often wondered why since last May."

"We were married in May," He said, folding his arms after a method much in favor with the popular novelist when heroes are grim.

"It seems," She said, rather drearily, "a long time ago."

"If I had told you last May," He retorted, "that I object to wake in the middle of the night with one Japanese pug snorting upon my—ah—my chest, and the other usurping the greater part of my pillow, you would have sympathized with my feeling, understood the objection, and relegated Sada Yacco and Abé San to their comfortable basket in the corner of the kitchen—or anywhere else," he added hurriedly, seeing thievish early errand-boys on the tip of her tongue, "except your bedroom!"

The popular novelist would have described her pose as "sculpturesque," her expression as "fateful," and her tone as "icy," as She said:

"The bedroom being mine, perhaps you will permit me to remind you that you possess one of your own, and that it is nearly one o'clock!"

It was, in fact, a quarter-past twelve. But the door closed behind Him with such a terrific bang that the thready little utterance of the silver timepiece was completely unnoticed.

She put her hand to her throat, as a leading actress invariably does in moments of great mental stress, and uttered a choking little laugh of sorrow and bitterness. Men were really like this, then! Fool, oh, fool, to doubt! Had she not read, had she not seen, had not other women whispered? . . . And had her mother not plainly told her that this man—now her husband!—was more like other men than any of the other men resembled others? She sobbed a few sobs, dried her eyes, and prepared for bed. But when arrayed in white samite, mystic and wonderful, with the traces of tears effaced by perfumed hot water, the pinkness of nose and eyelids ameliorated by a dab or two of powder, the gold-brown tresses He had once sonneted, and now

sneered at, brushed out and beautiful, she took up the double basket owned by Sada Yacco and Abé San, placed it in the boudoir, returned for the canine couple, deposited them inside it, and then, resolutely shutting the door of communication upon their astonished countenances, got into bed, cast one indifferent glance at the twin couch adjoining, shrugged her shoulders, and switched off the light.

“S’n’ff!”

That was Abé San snuffing inquiringly at the bottom of the door. Sada Yacco joined him, and they snuffed together. It was impossible to sleep, especially when they began to discuss the situation in whimpers and short yelps. Then they began to race round the boudoir, barking in whimpers. Then, just as She had made up her mind to buy peace by letting them in, there was a sharp bark from Sada Yacco, a joyous scrape at a distant door, and a rattling of claws as the couple, emancipated from vile durance in the boudoir, joyously galloped down the passage. Then sleep soporifically stole over the senses of a wronged and brutally injured woman. It was not chilly, sloppy December: it was radiant July. She was not in a London flat. She was in a well-known back-water above Goring-on-Thames, cosy in a red-curtained punt, with a Japanese umbrella and two Japanese pugs and a husband, very handsome, almost quite new, madly devoted, not the quite plain, absolutely sulky, unspeakably disagreeable He now conjecturally snoring on the opposite side of the passage. And so She slept and dreamed.

He was not asleep. Propped up in his own beautiful little bed in his own cosy dressing-room, he was smoking a long cigar, and, as a further demonstration of bachelor independence, a brandy and Apollinaris stood untouched

beside him. By the electric light dangling over his head, where sardonically hung suspended a wooden Cupid—ha, ha!—he was perusing a book. She objected to reading in bed, that was why—ha, ha! again. The thin-paper volume, supposed to be an enlightening work on Oval Billiards, proved, by a tricky freak of Fate, to be an English translation of *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. This is what he read:

“Calm is the bottom of my sea:
Who would divine that it hideth droll monsters?
Unmoved is my depth, yet it sparkleth with swimming enigmas
and laughters.
An imposing One saw I to-day—a solemn One, a penitent of the
Spirit . . .
Should he become weary of his imposingness, this imposing
one . . .”

There came a scratch at the bottom of the door, a snuffling sound, and a sneeze he knew well. What did Abé San straying about draughty passages by night? But it was no business of his. Let the beast's owner see to it. He read on:

“Gracefulness belongeth to the generosity of the magnanimous.”

Sada Yacco had joined her lord. Together they burrowed, mutually they snuffed. It was not to be borne. He got up and opened the door. Sada Yacco and Abé San rushed in, their tongues lolling, their eyes bulging with curiosity, and, after a brief excursion round the apartment, which they found small, fawned upon him with a sickening devotion. He scowled on the small black-and-white silky handfuls. Then he yielded to the impulse that plucked at his maxillary muscles and grinned. The little brutes were so painfully sorry for

him. They were so clearly under the impression that he was in disgrace.

He got back into bed, and lay there, grinning still, if unwillingly. Sada Yacco, with the forwardness of her sex, scrambled up and sat upon him. Abé San scratched at the coverlet imploringly, until, hoisted upward by the scruff, he, too, gained the desired haven. They had plainly come to stay, so He resigned himself with a sigh, switched off the electric light, and fell asleep before Abé San had turned round the regulation number of times.

Meanwhile She, wakened by the toot of a belated motor-taxi, began to wonder whither the Japanese couple had strayed. Urged and wearied by the unbroken silence, she rose, arrayed herself in her dressing gown, armed herself with a lighted wax taper in a silver candlestick—another wedding present—and began a tour of discovery. The pugs had vanished. Had the maids yielded to their entreaties and taken them in? She listened at two doors; the steady snoring of the sleepers within was unmingled with snort or slumbering whimper of Sada and her mate. Then, returning, she noticed that His dressing-room door was open.

Taper in hand, She went in. He was sound asleep, Sada Yacco sweetly slumbering on the surface covered by daylight with a waistcoat, Abé San curled up, a floss-silk ball, on the pillow by his ear. If he had seen her eyes as she bent over him, shading the light, he would have regained his old opinion of them in the twinkling of the tear She dropped upon His cheek.

Don't say there are no such things as guardian angels. His woke him up just as She kissed him—the kiss was so light it would not have wakened him by itself.

THE LAST EXPEDITION

I

SUPPOSE that you see Captain Arthur Magellison, late of His Majesty's Royal Navy, with the eyes of the writer's remembrance, as a thick-set, fair man of middle height, neat in appearance and alert in bearing. His skin was a curious bleached bronze, and his wide-pupilled pale gray eyes, netted about with close, fine wrinkles, had looked on the awful desolation of the Arctic until something of its loneliness and terror had sunk into them and stamped itself upon the man's brain, never to be effaced, or so it seemed to me. For his wife, once the marble Miss Dycehurst, who had not married a semi-Celebrity for nothing, took her husband much with her into London Society, and at gossipy dinner-tables and in crowded drawing-rooms; on the Lawn at Ascot and in a box on the Grand Stand at Doncaster, as on a Henley houseboat, and during a polo tournament at Ranelagh, I have seen Magellison, to all appearance perfectly oblivious of the gay and giddy world about him, sitting, or standing with folded arms and bent head, and staring out with fixed and watchful eyes, over Heaven knows what illimitable wastes of snow-covered land or frozen ocean. . . .

I have described Captain Arthur Magellison as a semi-Celebrity. Erstwhile Commander of the Third-class Armored Destroyer *Sidonia*, he became, after his severance from the Royal Navy, and by reason of the adventures and hardships by him undergone as leader of the Scottish Alaskan Coastal Survey Expedition of 1906-1908,

something of a hero. A series of lectures, delivered at the Edinburgh Hall of Science, in the course of which the explorer, by verbal descriptions as well as cinematographic effects, completely disposed of the theory regarding the existence of a range of active volcanoes to the north of Alaska, previously accepted by the illuminati, made a sensation among scientists, and induced, in the case of Sir Jedbury Fargoe, F.R.G.S., M.R.I., a rush of blood to the cerebrum, followed by the breaking out of a Funeral Hatchment over his front-door, a procession in slow time, with wreaths, palls, and feathers, and a final exit *per* trolley into the Furnace at Croking Crematorium.

The Public, never having bothered about the volcanoes, remained unmoved by the intelligence of their non-existence, but the Professors and the Press shed much ink upon the subject. Upon a wave of which sable fluid Captain Arthur Magellison was borne, if not into the inner court, at least into the vestibule of the Temple of Fame. Then the wave, as is the way of waves, receded; leaving Magellison, by virtue of certain researches and discoveries in Natural History, Botany and Physiology, a Member of the Royal Institution, Associate of the Zoological Society, Fellow of the Institute of Ethnology, and the husband of the marble Miss Dycehurst.

Never was a more appropriate sobriquet bestowed. Down in Clayshire, her native county, the statuesque Geraldine, orphan heiress of a wealthy landholder not remotely connected with the Brewing interests of his native isle, dispensed, under the protective auspices of a maternal aunt of good family—Miss Dicehurst's mother's deceased papa had wedded a portionless spinster of noble blood—dispensed, I say, a lavish but stony

hospitality. In London she went out a great deal, looking like a sculptured Minerva of the Græco-Latin school, *minus* the helmet but *plus* a tower of astonishing golden hair, received proposals from Eligibles and Ineligibles, petrified their makers with a single stare, and proceeded upon her marmorean way in maiden meditation, fancy free. Until she attended that series of lectures, delivered at the Edinburgh Hall of Science by the eminent Arctic Explorer, Captain Arthur Magellison.

Society in Clayshire and Society in London expressed ardent curiosity to know how the engagement had been brought about? All that is known for certain is, that after the lecture, when the Explorer held a little reception in a draughty enclosure of green baize screens, Miss Dycehurst, looking rather like a mythical goddess of the Polar Regions, her frosty beauty crowned with its diadem of pale golden hair, and her fine shape revealed in greenish-blue, icily-gleaming draperies, asked a local magnate to present the lecturer, and met him at a public dinner given in his honor upon the following night. Later on in London, where the lecture was, by invitation of the learned heads of the nation, repeated, Miss Dycehurst with a large party occupied the second row of stalls. Later still, Magellison dined with the heiress at 000, Chesterfield Crescent, her town address, and later still the couple were Hanover-Squared into one flesh. It was in May, and the sacred edifice was garlanded with white Rambler roses and adorned with lilies and smilax and palms. A Bishop tied the knot, and the choir rendered the anthem with exquisite effect, as well as "Fight the Good Fight" and "The Voice that Breathed——." And the Bride, in dead white, with a swansdown train and a Malines veil, and ropes of pearls and brilliants, and a crown of diamond spikes that might have been

sparkling icicles, gleaming and scintillating on the summit of her wonderful tower of hair, looked more like the Lady of the Eternal Snows than ever.

No one knew whether the Magellisons' married life was happy or the other thing. Suffice it, as the popular three-volume novelist used to say when not compelled to pad, that, to all outward seeming, the couple agreed. But I think that when the high tide of Fame receded (as during 1909, when the thrilling adventures of the dauntless explorer, Blank, were electrifying the newspaper-reading world, it certainly did, leaving nothing but a vague halo of heroism and adventure hanging about the name of Magellison, and a sedimentary deposit of honorary letters at the tail of it) the woman who had married Magellison knew disillusion. As for Magellison, he had always been a silent, absorbed and solitary man. And that strange look in those wide-pupilled pale gray eyes of his, the eyes of one who has lived through the half-year-long twilight of Arctic nights, and seen the ringed moon with her mock moons glimmer through the ghostly frost-fog, and the pale pink curving feathers of the Aurora Borealis stream across the ice-blue sky, and the awful crimson of the Polar Day rush up beyond the floe and strike the icy loneliness into new beauty and new terror—never changed. Perhaps, in discovering the true nature of his Geraldine, the Explorer found himself traversing a colder and more rugged desert than he had encountered when he led the Scottish-Northumbrian Polar Expedition in quest of those volcanic ranges proved to be non-existent—in Alaska to the North.

I believe he really loved the woman he had married. I know that, while he acted as the unpaid steward of her estates, he spent nothing beyond his half-pay, eked out by articles which he wrote now and then for the kind of

Scientific Review that rewards the contributor with ten shillings per page of one thousand words, *plus* the honor of having contributed. In his own houses—his wife's, I should say—he was a pathetic nonentity. At 000 Chesterfield Crescent, and at Edengates in Clayshire, the recent Miss Dycehurst's country seat, he hugged his own rooms, about which, arranged in cases and hung upon the walls, were disposed native weapons, stuffed birds, geological specimens, dried algæ, water-color sketches, and such trophies of the Survey Expedition as had not been presented by Magellison to needy museums. When his name appeared in newspaper-paragraphs as the writer of one of the articles referred to, or as the donor of such a gift, his wife would pluck him from his beloved solitude, and compel him to tread the social round with her. But as the slow years crept on, the man himself, long before the ebbing tide of Fame left a desolate stretch of seaweedy mud where its waters had heaved and whispered, was so rarely seen, in his wife's company or out of it, that her all-but-newest friends believed Mrs. Arthur Magellison to be the wife of an incurable invalid, and the most recent were convinced that she was a widow. Proposals of marriage were sometimes made to the lady, who by the way was handsomer and stonier than ever, by Eligibles or Ineligibles laboring under this conviction.

"I am extremely sensible of the honor you have done me," said Mrs. Magellison upon one of these occasions, "but as a fact, my husband is alive. Which relieves me of the necessity—don't you think?—of coming to a decision!"

The man who had proposed, a barely middle-aged, extremely good-looking, well-made, well-bred Hawting-Holliday of Hirlmere, sufficiently endowed with ancient,

if embarrassed, acres, and a sixteenth-century Baronetcy, to have tempted the marble Geraldine, had her frosty hand been disengaged, to its bestowal on him, was, though impecunious enough to be strongly attracted by the lady's wealth, yet honestly enamored of her sculptur-esque person. Consequently as the final syllable of the foregoing utterance fell from the lady's lips, he assumed, for a fleeting instant or so, the rosy complexion of early adolescence, and stared upon the conquering Geraldine with blank and circular eyes. Then he said:

"By—Jove! that does let me out, doesn't it? My dear lady, I entreat you to consider me as prostrate in humiliation at your feet. With"—he felt over the surface of an admirably thought-out waistcoat for his eye-glass, which was still in his eye—"with sackcloth and ashes, and all the appropriate trimmings. Let me retrieve my character in your eyes by saying, that if it—ahem!—gives you any gratification to have a live husband at this juncture—I will endeavor to share the sentiment. But you really have run him as a Dark Horse, now haven't you?"

He lifted his eyebrows in interrogation, and the eye-glass leaped into the folds of his well-chosen cravat, the kind of subdued yet hopeful thing in shades a man of taste and brains would put on to propose in.

"My dear Sir Robert," Mrs. Magellison said, in well-chosen language and with an icy little smile, "I am not an adept in the use of sporting phraseology. Captain Magellison is of studious habits, retiring nature, and—shall I say?—an indolent disposition. It would not very well become me if I insisted on his society when he is not disposed to bestow it upon me, and therefore I generally go out alone. When, unless I give a formal dinner, upon which an occasion my husband must neces-

sarily take his place at the other end of the board—when I entertain intimates——”

“You put your people at a round table,” said Hawting-Holliday of Hirlmere. “And a round table is the very deuce—and—all for obliterating a husband!” He found his eyeglass and screwed it firmly in.

“I do not altogether blame the table,” said Mrs. Magellison coldly. “Because, upon nine occasions out of ten my husband prefers a cutlet in his rooms. Pray do not suppose that I find fault with the preference. He is not by nature sociable, as I have said, and prefers to follow, at Edengates and in Scotland and in Paris, as well as here in town, his own peculiar bent. And what that is you are probably aware?” She turned her head with a superb movement, and her helmet of pale hair gleamed in the wintry sunshine that streamed through the lace blinds of the Chesterfield Crescent drawing-room.

“I had a general idea,” said the man she addressed, who, hampered in early life by the fact of being born a Hawting-Holliday of Hirlmere, had not succeeded in being anything else, “that the late—I beg your pardon!—the present Captain Magellison was—I should say is—a Scientific Buffer—of sorts!”

Mrs. Magellison smiled coldly and rose.

“The term you employ is slang, of course,” she said, “but it is quite appropriate and really descriptive. My husband was once a famous man, he is now a Scientific Buffer—and as you say—of sorts. Would you like to see him?”

She moved to the drawing-room door and turned her head with another fine movement, and Hawting-Holliday’s eclectic taste was charmed with the sculpturesque pose. He followed her and they crossed a landing, and

Mrs. Magellison knocked at the door of one of a suite of rooms that had been thrown out over what had been a back-yard. And as nobody said "Come in," she entered, followed by the visitor.

II

The room was long, carpeted but uncurtained, and lighted by that most depressing of all forms of illumination, a skylight. Dwarf bookcases ran round it, and the walls were covered with frames and glass cases, primitive weapons, and a multitude of quaint and curious things. There was a low couch, covered with seal skins and feather rugs, and a leather writing-chair was set at the table, which had on it a fine microscope and many scientific instruments, of which the uses were unknown to the head of the Hawting-Hollidays of Hirlmere. Piles of dusty papers there were, and a couple of battered ship's logs, stained and discolored by sea-water and grease. And in the writing-chair, with his feet on a magnificent Polar bear-skin and the receiver of a telephone at his ear, sat the Scientific Buffer of sorts, staring fixedly before him, apparently over an illimitable waste of frozen drift-ice covering uncharted Polar seas.

"Arthur!" said Mrs. Magellison, with a cold kind of impatience, rattling the handle of the door as if to attract his attention. He came back with a start and hung up the receiver, and rose. He had a simple, courteous manner that won upon the suitor who had just proposed to his wife; and oddly enough, the appearance of a servant with a message that summoned the lady to an interview with her *modiste* was not greatly regretted by Hawting-Holliday.

"I have seen you before, of course," said his host, making him free of a rack of Esquimaux pipes and pushing over a jar of Navy-cut.

"Have you though?" rose to the visitor's lips, but the words were not allowed to escape. Looking round he saw that there were piles of receipted accounts, and orderly piles of tradesmen's books upon the table with the reams of dusty MSS., and as servants came in for orders and went away instructed, and messages were telephoned to various purveyors, Hawting-Holliday arrived at the conclusion that Mrs. Magellison's husband was regarded less in that capacity by Mrs. Magellison and her household than as major-domo, head-bailiff and house-steward.

The two men chatted a little, and presently one spoke while the other listened. The capacity for hero-worship is quick in every generous nature, and the extravagant, impoverished, high-bred county gentleman and man-about-town was conscious that this modest, absent-minded little ex-naval Commander was of the stuff that went to build great heroes. Franklin and Nansen were brothers to this man, and that the justly-honored names of Shackleton and Peary, and the cognomen of Cook (King of terminological inexactitudinarians), were hot upon the public's mouths just then, mattered nothing to Hawting-Holliday, as he heard how in the year of Our Lord Nineteen Hundred and Six, ten men sailed from San Francisco for Bering Sea on board a sixty-ton schooner, to settle the question of the existence of Undiscovered Ranges of Volcanic Origin in Alaska to the North. And how great storms and awful blizzards hindered the Coastal Survey Expedition, and sickness crippled its members, yet they struggled gamely on.

"Good God!" said Hawting-Holliday, whose pipe had long since gone out. He heard next how the Expedition suffered the loss of their ship and all their stores, and how their leader sent his crew home by a passing whaler and, for the enlargement of his own experience, chose to journey back to civilization along the Alaskan coast, three thousand miles of solitary sledge-traveling, aided only by the Esquimaux he chanced on in his terrible journey. And as he went on narrating in his calm and even voice, enforcing a point by a modest gesture of the hand that had lost the top-joints of the first and second fingers, and sometimes looking through and beyond the face of the listener with those strange, sorrowful, far-away eyes, what he related the other man saw, and——

"Good Lord!" said Hawting-Holliday again, "what an Odyssey the whole thing is! And so you got back to Ithaca after eighteen months of tramping it on your lonesome along a frozen coast and sleeping in holes dug in the snow, and living on blubber and seal-meat or boiled skin-boots when you couldn't get anything else; and gathering knowledge and experience when there wasn't even reindeer moss to scrape off the rocks!" He got up and held out his hand. "As a perfectly useless and idle kind of beggar, I don't know that my sincere admiration and respect are worth having, Captain, but if they were!——"

He gulped, and went, quite clumsily, away, but came back again, and so a friendship grew between the "perfectly useless and idle kind of beggar," Hawting-Holliday, and the hero of the three-thousand-mile tramp back to Civilization. Perhaps Hawting-Holliday had really never been seriously attached to the handsome piece of statuary that bore Magellison's name. It is certain that

her cold neglect and open contempt of her husband eventually kindled the wrath of Magellison's newly-won champion to boiling-point. Not that the Captain gave any perceptible sign of suffering under the icy blizzard of his wife's scorn. Endurance was the lesson he had learned best of all, and he agreed with her in regarding himself as a Failure.

"A beautiful and gifted woman has a right to be ambitious for the man she marries," he said once to Hawting-Holliday. "And if he has no power to keep at high-level, if he makes no more way than a schooner frozen in the floe, it is natural that she should feel keenly disappointed and—and manifest the feeling by a—a certain change of attitude as regards him."

"The schooner may be frozen in the floe, Captain," said Hawting-Holliday, lounging in the window-seat of the Captain's big, bare room at Edengates, that was—only barring the skylight—exactly like the Captain's other big bare room at 000, Chesterfield Crescent. "But the floe is traveling all the time. That's a bit of scientific information that I got from you. And I rather pride myself on applying it neatly."

The Captain looked hard at him, and Hawting-Holliday noticed for the first time that the curly fair hair that topped the deep-lined pale-bronze face was growing white. Then Magellison said, with a queer smile:

"You have found me out, I see! And yet I thought I had kept the secret—or rather, the arrangement, quite closely. But on the whole I'm rather glad you guessed. For I like you, young man"—Hawting-Holliday was at least thirty-five—"and I shall give you the parting hand-shake with sincere regret—with very sincere regret, when the ice breaks up and the little engine helps the hoisted sails, and the floe-bound vessel that never

really stopped, although her journey was only of inches in the month—moves on not North but South, along the thawed and open sea-lanes——”

He stopped, for Hawting-Holliday dropped his pipe and got off the window-seat, and caught the maimed right hand and wrung it until its owner winced.

“You gave me credit for too much perspicuity, Captain. I hadn’t seen as much as the cat’s tail until you let her out of the bag. Where are you going, man, and when do you go?”

Briefly, Magellison told him.

“All right, Captain,” said Hawting-Holliday. “You’re going to take charge of the Steam and Sail Antarctic Geological Research Expedition, financed by the Swedish Government, sailing from Plymouth for King Edward Land in April, so as to get the summer months of December, January, and February for exploration, botanizing, deep-sea-dredging, and scientific observations. You calculate on being away not quite three years. Very well, but remember this! If you don’t turn up in three years’ time and no definite news has reached us as to your whereabouts, the most useless and idle dog of my acquaintance—and that’s myself—will take the liberty to come and look for you. I swear it—by the Great Barrier and the Blue Antarctic Ooze!”

They shook hands upon it, laughing at the humorous idea of the Captain’s not coming back, and a little later the news of her husband’s impending departure was imparted, *per* the medium of the Press, to the marmorean lady to whom the explorer had frozen himself some few years previously. She was radiant with smiles at the revival of newspaper interest in Magellison, and postponed her spring visit to the Riviera for the purpose of giving a series of Departure Dinners in honor of the

Captain. All the leading scientific lights of the day twinkled in turn about the board. And Geraldine wore all her diamonds, and was exceedingly gracious to her Distinguished Man. She saw him off from Plymouth, one balmy April day, and shed a few discreet tears in a minute and filmy pocket-handkerchief as the Swedish oak-built, schooner-rigged steamship-sailer *Selma* ran up the Swedish colors and curtsied adieu to English waters at the outset of the long South Atlantic voyage, and the petrol steam-launch containing the friends and relatives of the Expedition rocked in her wake, and the red-eyed people crowding on the oily-smelling little vessel's decks raised a quavering farewell cheer. Two men stood together at the *Selma's* after-rail: a short, square man of muscular build, with a slight stoop that told of scholarly habits, and thick, fair hair, streaked with white, and a deeply-lined, clean-shaven face, with pale, far-seeing eyes that were set in a network of fine wrinkles. The other man was Hawting-Holliday, who had announced his intention, at the last minute, of accompanying the Expedition as far as Madeira for the sake of the sea-blow.

"Tell Geraldine I shall mail home from the Cape and Melbourne," the leader of the Expedition said, three days later, as the boat that was to convey Hawting-Holliday ashore bobbed under the *Selma's* side-ladder in a clamoring rout of tradesmen's luggers and Funchal market-flats. "Tell her I shall certainly communicate from Lyttelton, and after that she must trust to luck and homeward-bound whalers for news of me." He wrung Hawting-Holliday's hand, and added, "And in case—anything should happen to me—not that such a chance is worth speaking of!—I know that I can rely upon you to act towards my—my dear girl as a friend!"

The Captain's voice shook a little, and a mist was over those clear, wide-pupilled, far-away-gazing gray eyes.

"I promise you that, faithfully," said Hawting-Holliday, and gripped the maimed right hand of the man he loved as a brother, and went down over the side of the *Selma* with a sore heart.

That was in April, 1910, and news of the loss of the *Selma* in the ice of the Antarctic Circle was cabled from Honolulu at the beginning of last month. An American Antarctic Expedition, having concluded a mission of exploration in the summer season of 1910, finding upon the coast of King Edward Land the few survivors of the Swedish Steam and Sail Antarctic Research Expedition making preparations to winter in a wooden hut built out of the wreckage of their teak-built sailing-steamer—rescued and carried them on their homeward route. The saved men, later interviewed at San Francisco, were unable to give news of their leader, save that the Captain, taking a dog-sledge and a little stock of provisions and instruments, and a hearty leave of all of them, turned that lined bronze face of his and those eyes with the far-away look in their wide pupils, to the dim, mysterious, uncharted regions lying South, in the lap of the mysterious Unknown, and with a wave of a fur-gloved hand, was lost in them.

* * * * *

"He is dead, Arthur is dead!" moaned Geraldine Magellison, in the depths of conjugal anguish and a lace-covered sofa-cushion, when the Press and Hawting-Holliday broke the news between them. "Dead!—and I loved him so—I loved him so!"

"It is a pity, under the circumstances," said Hawting-Holliday, carrying out his promise of being a friend to Magellison's wife by telling that wife the truth, "that

you were so economical in your expressions of affection. For I do not think that when the Captain left you he had any remaining illusions as to the nature of your regard for him."

"How cruel you are—how cruel!" gasped Geraldine, as her maid bore in a salver piled with the regrets of Learned Societies and the sympathy of distinguished Personages and private friends.

"Let me for once use the trite and hackneyed saying that I am cruel only to be kind!" said Hawting-Holliday, emphatically, "and that I speak solely in the interests of—a friend whom I love."

Mrs. Magellison flushed to the roots of her superb golden hair, and consciously drooped her scarcely-red-denied eyelids as she held up a protesting hand.

"No, no, Sir Robert!" she pleaded. "If I—as you infer—have gravely erred in lack of warmth toward poor, poor, dearest Arthur! let me at least be ungrudging in respect of his great memory. Forget what you have said, carried away by a feeling which in honor you subdued after the rude awakening of many months ago, and do not revert to—the subject for—for *at least* a year to come!"

At that Hawting-Holliday got upon his legs, and thrusting his hands deep into his trouser-pockets, made the one and only harangue of his existence.

"Mrs. Magellison, when you suggest that in the very hour when the intelligence of grave disaster to your husband's vessel has reached us, I am capable of addressing you in what the poetic faculty term—Heaven knows how idiotically and falsely!—the language of love, *you* gravely err. The friend in whose interests I spoke just now, was—your husband. *Is* your husband—for I do not accept by any means the theory that because he has

been lost sight of, he is dead. I believe him to be living. I shall go on believing this until I see his body, or meet with some relics of him that supply me—his friend!—with the evidence that you, his wife, are so uncommonly ready to dispense with.”

His eyes burned her with their contempt. She gasped:

“You—you mean that you are going South to try and find him?”

“You comprehend my meaning perfectly,” said Hawting-Holliday, and bowed to Mrs. Magellison with ironical deference and left her.

He was, though not a wealthy man, far from being a poor one. He chartered a stout vessel that was lying in Liverpool Docks, the Iceland Coast Survey Company’s steam-and-sail schooner *Snowbird*, and equipped and provisioned and manned her with a speed and thoroughness that are seldom found in combination. The *Snowbird*’s own skipper goes in charge of his ship, but Hawting-Holliday is the Leader of the Expedition.

And yesterday the *Snowbird* sailed, in search of that man who has been swallowed up by the great Conjecture. And of this I am sure, that whether Hawting-Holliday succeeds or fails, lives or dies, he will grasp the hand of his friend again Somewhere. Either upon this side of the Great Gray Veil that hangs in the doorway of the Smoky House, or upon the other. . . .

THE END





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